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AN ISLAND OF EDEN

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By

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Author of "Averno," "Seaford's Snake," "A Dual Resurrection," "The Heath Hover Mystery," etc.

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Book I

PROLOGUE

THEY were both on deck. As each howling green sea swept the ship they hung on together under the lee of the companion stairway. The other passengers were snug below, if being vehemently and continuously seasick can constitute anything under the term " snug." The captain had represented to these two that *they* would be far more snug below, but they were on the best of terms with the captain, so the latter had said no more, and there they were. She, in a sort of motor-car oilskin, was looking out upon the sea, and rather enjoying the situation. He, trying to suck hardly at a pipe, was enjoying it too. After dinner when they had come up on deck the tornado had burst, the first part of it. The islands they had been cruising in between when driven out of their course by a course of " Pacific " tornadoes, were shut out in dimness and mist. The captain and chief officer on the bridge together would have been the first to own candidly and in confidence, after the voyage was over, that they were in a very tight place. Now the reckoning was about lost—as those two functionaries might or might not have candidly conceded—under relaxed circumtances.

The awful howl of the gale tore through the masts and spars; the ship was brig-rigged, and carried square yards. The pant and striving in the engine room sounded human, like an athlete at the end of his course. Then another vast green sea came swirling from forrard. The hoarse cries of the hands, and the bellowed shouts from the bridge were hardly audible through the roar of inconceivable masses of water and the thunder along the decks. The while, aloft, the shrill yelling of the wind, and, as it seemed, the hissing of misty scud, blotted out everything outside of three yards.

Then came a crash—a sickening, crunching, grinding crash. Again it came, like the rip of a gigantic circular saw. The whole fabric of the ship quivered, and—these two, striving to keep some sort of balance by holding on under the lee of the deck-house, were in the water. In the sea. Yes. In the wide, open, vast sea—stretching from anywhere to anywhere. In the sea!

The wrack from the cut-off crests of the waves hit them and blinded them. The ship was behind them, or what was left of it, if anything. It was of no use dreaming of trying to get back to it. Here they were—in the sea; and to one of them it occurred immediately that if the ship had hit a reef, why then there was mainland. The next thing was to strike for mainland.

Of course this was all right. But huge waves curling over and swamping even the most powerful swimmer when weighted with another burden—why, what then?

"Keep hold on my shoulder, but don't clutch me

anywhere else," the man contrived to gasp out amid their struggle for life. One arm was underneath one of hers, he was swimming with the other, and quite efficiently supporting her. Where they were heading for Heaven alone knew. They had to go with the seas, at any rate this made for some sort of a shoreward course. But the waves were mountainous and breaking into curls of foam. This was suffocating, though better, as it pointed to a shoaling of water, and therefore shore of some sort. Yet the howling mist wrack was over them, blotting out everything. They seemed lost on the water chaos of the world. What then was the use of striving?

And then, in front, there arose a something—a something in the growing dusk light—a barrier falling dark as a mountainous roller swept and crashed over it, then obliterate again. There was no space or time to hesitate; no power either. The stupendous suck of the undertow held both these puny clinging castaways back for a moment, then the returning rush threw them—anywhere. One, half stunned, was feeling a way along the reef, to be pounded and battered again by the next incoming roller. The other—where was she? Separate—lost—but——?

And the roar of the waves and the shrill scream of the wind went on, but of human—petty insignificant human sign of life——?

None.

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE

BASTWICK of Wood-Bastwick and Bastwick Carrs was in a very bad humour. We regret to say that up to date he was very frequently taken that way, perhaps the weather had something to do with it, perhaps not. Excusably it might have this morning, for as he stood at the door which opened on to the pretence of a terrace which surrounded the house on three sides, the outlook was very depressing indeed. Even as he stood there a diagonal deluge of sleet and rain whipped against the porch, stinging his face and half powdering, half saturating, his clothes. But he did not seem to mind this, for he stood there staring out upon the cheerless prospect before him, puffing moodily at his after breakfast pipe. And the said prospect was cheerless. From where he stood the ground sloped abruptly over wide fields shut in by low monotonous hedges fringing a sodden stone wall, over which the scud was driving in a misty veil, causing the moorland heights beyond to loom out at twice their real altitude.

Weather has its inevitable effects on certain temperaments. On some it has no effects at all, on this one it had. And now, as he stood there gazing out

over the rain and wind-swept stretches of a portion of his own domain, he seemed to go back more into retrospect and the fatal habit of self-concentration.

"Vile," he ejaculated, "quite vile. No catch out of doors this morning at any rate, might be better in the afternoon;" and turning he re-entered and went straight to his library.

Outside the door he found the head keeper waiting.

"Not much good this morning, Mathers," he said in answer to the man's salutation as the latter followed him into the library. "Might lift in the afternoon a bit."

"Ay, sir. A' doot if it will do that."

Bastwick stared at him. The keeper was a man of contradictory habit, a not uncommon failing among his calling.

"Well, if it does," he said, "I'll try for a few brace, so you'd better be around about two."

The keeper retired, and Bastwick, with another disgusted look at the window and the weather, turned his attention to his morning correspondence. This was not a congenial undertaking. He hated the incoming post. It always contained a strong element of botheration. He soon chucked it aside, then unlocked a drawer in his writing-table and extracted some other correspondence of a totally different nature. This would seem to comprise the element of botheration too, to judge by his expression as he turned it over; yet the said expression, though no more jubilant, was a totally different one to that which had rested on his countenance before.

For quite a while he sat poring over this, rather should we say wrapt up in it. The house was silent

as the grave, a silence only broken by the tick, tick of the clock over the mantelpiece. He looked up in irritation. He rose, and going over to the mantelpiece took the clock and deliberately stood it on its head. Then he returned to his seat and lighted a fresh pipe.

"What a fool I am to bother about things or people that are past," ran his thoughts. "I'll make burnt shavings of all this stuff;" and he got up and went to the fire. But there something seemed to arrest him, some impulse, telepathic it might be or it might not. He crammed the correspondence back into the drawer and relocked it. Then he stood gazing out in abstraction at the whirling wreaths of scud, fitfully blotting out, then revealing, the valley beneath.

Seen thus Geoffrey Bastwick of Wood Bastwick, was a fine specimen of a man; tall, broad-shouldered, and powerful of frame. He had a keen dark face, somewhat lined, clean-shaven but for a thick moustache. His hair was just going grey about the temples, but to the physiognomist it was obvious that the owner of that face was somewhat younger than he looked. Yet there was no apparent reason why this should be so, but then, as the proverb says, "Every donkey knows where his own saddle galls him."

The library was a low-ceiled, oak-panelled room, with one large window commanding a wide sweeping view for miles and miles. Its shelves were profusely stored with books ancient and modern, some of the former of very considerable interest and proportionate value to the collector. A glass case devoted to

guns occupied one corner, and to this Bastwick half absently walked. There were double rifles and magazine rifles, to every one of which some association was attached, as well as the homely and up-to-date shot gun of "merrie England." He took out one or two of the last and absently looked at it and replaced it. Then a sound fell upon his ear, seeming to bring him out of his abstraction. Only a light tread and the lilt of a voice. The door opened.

"Hullo, Uncle Geoff. Isn't it dismal this morning? And you—why you don't look particularly lively either. Shall we go and play billiards and wait till the clouds roll by'?"

"I don't feel much inclined that way. I've got some stuff to attend to here, Ethne."

The girl looked disappointed. She was a pretty girl, golden-haired, blue-eyed and with rather a wistful mouth; a very pretty girl of her type. Although she had apostrophized Bastwick as uncle, she was really only a distant cousin. But he detested the prefix of cousin to his name, so she gave him the more venerable brevet, in deference to the gulf between their ages. He had given her a home when she had been left an orphan, and without a penny, to face a "hard and rotten world" as he put it. That was some years ago, when Ethne Cheyne was at the awkward and angular age; since then she had grown up more and more alluring to the eye and otherwise engaging, and Bastwick liked people and things about him of which such held good. If it was gloomy for her, he thought in moments of qualm, to be boxed up alone in a gloomy

house, with a frequently gloomy man, at any rate there were compensations, and thinking over the ghastly lack of any prospect in life before a girl situated as she had found herself, any such qualms were set at rest.

Yet somehow between the relations of the two, there was a something wanting, and that was a certain indefinable lack of sympathy. Neither could have told exactly where such began and ended but it was there. On the whole, however, they got along together more than fairly well.

"I heard you telling Mathers this morning that you would go out if it cleared," she said. "Shall you?"

"Oh yes."

"Can I come too?"

That hesitation on the part of Bastwick was perhaps a touch of the lack of sympathy above mentioned.

"Come too? Why, child, you don't propose wading through three or four inches of liquid peat for three hours or so? Why, we should have you in bed for the next week."

There was nothing intentional in the remark, but it struck upon the girl somewhat jarringly, the fact being that she was somewhat more addicted to lying up than a girl of her age and surroundings had any business to be, and she had often fancied that her relative secretly resented this, though he had never by word let drop that such might be the case. Now she only said—

"Oh well, perhaps I'd better not."

"I'm sure of it," said the other. "Why, the

"It isn't that, but perhaps I've got an imagination, and I don't like looking at ugly things, so why should I?"

"Why? To break off an obsession and that the Jabberwock's head. I don't like looking at ugly things either, I prefer looking at pretty things, hence when you came in just now I was rather pleased."

He was looking at her with a comical, whimsical expression. She for her part laughed. She forgot the Jabberwock's head or very nearly so. Ethne Cheyne was fond of compliments, she got plenty from the sparse sprinkling of unlicked pups which represented the juvenile male section of her surroundings, but a genuine one from this saturnine relative of hers, of whom she stood secretly in some awe, was worth the lot. Wherefore she laughed gaily, pleasedly.

"All right, dear. I'll kiss the Jabberwock if you like; if it will give you any pleasure, that is?"

"But it won't a bit, it'd be sheer waste of valuable material; you can expend it on me instead, if you like." She laughed again and did so.

"Then I can come out with you this afternoon, can't I?"

"Oh, you are on the wheedling tack, are you? Well, then, see what you can do looking out boots and gaiters, for, by the Lord, you'll want them. Now cut away, for I have some letters to answer, confound them."

Left alone Bastwick did not immediately turn to the task he had announced for himself. He had been in a gloomy mood when the girl had come in,

and her bright young presence had partly dispelled it. He sat thinking of her and of the four years during which she had helped to brighten up his life. Helped, yes, for she could not entirely do so; there was one perhaps who might have been able to, but—there, what was the use of thinking of that? It was all past and done with; no good raking dead ashes. Nothing like doing something whatever it was and forgetting, and with this philosophical reflection he set to work to tackle his morning correspondence.

Yet somehow he could not concentrate. All sorts of memories, by no means vague, cropped up as they had a knack of cropping up at times. The Jabberwock's head, as Ethne from the first had surnamed the artistic but repulsive piece of oak sculpture, seemed to stare at him with a new and hateful fascination; mockingly, jibingly, fiendishly. For a moment an irresistible influence seemed to come upon him to find a saw and sever the hateful thing and drop it in the fire as the girl had suggested. Then he laughed.

"What's coming over me?" he said to himself. "What the very devil is coming over me?" But he did not supply the answer. That was—brooding, self-concentration, morbidity of introspection.

All unnecessary, all damaging.

CHAPTER II

THE MOOR

THE house at Wood Bastwick stood high. On every side but one the ground fell directly from it, and the one which did not was utilized as a wild garden. There everything flourished in untrammelled profusion; even the laying out of the beds was unconventional to a degree. But it formed a rare sanctuary for birds, of which its owner was extremely fond, and in due season a perfect chorus of thrush and warbler voices rose from it, nearly the twenty-four hours through.

The house itself and its appended buildings wore a certain air of severe picturesqueness. It stood stern and square to the bleak moorland winds, and on to the said moorland whence those bleak winds raved, it commanded a view on three sides—gorgeous, glowing in purple seas splashed with gold when the heather and gorse were out, now brown billows picked out with morose grey masses of rock. Here and there between the moorland and the abrupt rise on which the house stood, a patch of dark fir covert or a line of smooth, red-stemmed, Scotch firs, their blue plumed tops slanting from the direction of the autumnal and winter gales. There was nothing of the soft, leafy, rich meadow beauty of

more southern landscapes here. No slow-winding river through buttercup spangled meads, or the lazy plash of the hoary mill wheel, where the swallows skimmed the surface of the pool below in low, arrowy flight. Instead of the wheel, however, you heard the plash of water leaping from pool to pool where the trout lay and leapt, and the meadows and the rugged moorland heights beyond were studded with wiry, black-faced sheep. But all this, though lacking the slumbrous charm of the leafy southern scenes, bore a charm of its own, a charm that made itself felt alike in the grey lower of the winter sky, with its tang of piercing air, and in the period of sun-flooded purple when the heather blushed, and the nights had hardly time to melt into day. Down on the lower ground, a little over a mile away, rose the square, weather-beaten church tower of the hamlet of Potterton.

It was a curious tradition, a very curious tradition, but it held good all the same, that each successive owner of Wood Bastwick had been of a gloomy temperament, and the present owner was certainly no exception to the rule. Was it that there was some influence underlying the stern severity of the surroundings that re-acted, or was it a matter of hereditary temperament; and yet the Bastwicks had by no means invariably inherited from father to son? Still, there it was.

Geoffrey Bastwick was not exactly popular with his few neighbours; neighbours, that is, of his own social standing. These, as represented by their feminine side, voted him a morose and selfish curmudgeon, who lived only for himself, and kept that

wretched girl mewed up and eating her soul out with boredom. But for this judgment he cared not a rap; smiled sardonically and if anything rather enjoyed it. On the male side, however, his reputation was far less black; in fact, it was not black at all, for Bastwick got on excellently well with his own sex. He could be amusing in his own queer, dry fashion, very. He had an unbounded store of anecdotes and caustic wit, and he was an excellent host, moreover he was a thorough sportsman, and a day on his moors was by no means to be despised. Be it noted that his entertaining mostly took the form of "stag" parties, and this the feminine element—perhaps excusably—resented.

It happened that in spite of the tardily and perhaps somewhat grudgingly accorded permission, Ethne did not accompany her relative that afternoon. Perhaps the unpromising look of the weather had daunted her, but at the last moment she declared she had changed her mind. Perhaps her said relative did not receive the intimation with unqualified regret. A girl was all very well about the house, or out for a walk on a fine day, but sludging through slimy, miry peat, and wet heather, on anything but a fine day, he opined she was out of place. He preferred to knock over his grouse alone, and now he was doing so in masterly style.

"How have we done, Mathers?" he said, as he took a seat upon a slippery, shining boulder, for the drizzle had set in again, enveloping the moor in a dank mist.

"Nae sae bad, sir, for a wee bit walk. That'll be ten brace and a half."

"Ah well, we'll make it thirteen. Thirteen's a lucky number, you know, Mathers."

"A lucky number. Ay, sir, but thirteen's an unlucky number."

"That's only in Scotland, Mathers; here it's just the reverse," he answered with a twinkle in his eyes. "You'll find *that* 'nae an unlucky number,'" tendering the other his flask, out of which he had just been refreshing himself with a modest nip.

"Ay, sir. A'm thinking that there can be nae bad luck aboot whisky." Then, going off into a chuckle as he tossed down his dram, "Did you ever hear tell of the story of the parish minister of Invertoul and Tam MacTavish of the Mill? The meenister was fond of having a crack and taking a pipe with Tam, and Tam would bring out the whisky and a bottle, but never a *bottle of whisky*; there was never mair than three fingers width at the bottom of the bottle, never mair nor that. One evening Tam says: 'Meenister, ye'll nae be finding that bad whisky.' 'Tam,' says the meenister, 'whisky never is bad, but it's sometimes nae too plentiful.'"

Bastwick laughed a grim, dry laugh, but a hearty one.

"That's capital, Mathers," he said, "and devilish true to life. Where do you get all those weird yarns of yours from, and you always seem to turn on some fresh one? Do you know, I think I'll collect them all some day and make a book of them?"

"Ay, sir," rejoined the other with grave imperturbability. "That'll be nae a bad plan. A'm

thinkin' we might go halves in what the book brings in."

His master laughed, more heartily still.

"I don't think either of our 'halves' will keep us even in whisky very long," he said. "The publisher will take care of that. Well, let's get to work again."

We have said that the rain had come on again, and now the thick, soft, penetrating drizzle would have been disgusting to many sportsmen. This one, however, once out, seemed rather to enjoy it than otherwise. It was just the sort of thing that took him out of himself. But it seemed to take him now quite an abnormal time to make up that two brace and a half to which he had pledged himself. The while the rain had turned into a thick mist, which now closed down upon them, blotting out everything.

"A'm thinkin' we'd better leave shootin' the noo, sir," said Mathers, calling in the well-trained red setter, which, though ranging quite close, was completely hidden from view. Bastwick assented.

"It's lucky Miss Ethne changed her mind at the last, Mathers," he said. "She wouldn't have been particularly happy up here with us now."

"Ay, sir, you'll excuse me sayin' it—but I don't believe in leddies out shootin'."

"Well, Mathers, for the matter of that, as you know, no more do I as a general rule, but it gives them the object for a healthy walk, you see, instead of stewing indoors and gossiping and setting up headaches and other imaginary ailments."

But the keeper shook his head and made no reply.

He was a sturdy Scot. His services were his master's, but his opinions were his own; a phase of character which Bastwick of all men was thoroughly capable of appreciating. They chatted on during their wet and squelchy trudge through the rimy opaque curtain of mist, on subjects of local interest, illustrated now and then by one of the keeper's droll, Scottish anecdotes. For the latter was a privileged servant and his master was wont to allow that not the least funny things which had ever been retailed to him had sprung from this source.

As all the world knows, or ought to know, nothing is more disconcerting and, if allowed to become so, demoralizing than thick mist on mountain or moor, or for the matter of that anywhere. But to these two, who knew every foot of the ground they were on, it was a mere temporary inconvenience, in that it put an end to the shooting. Every dank grey stone rising out of the heather was a landmark, even the faint puff of what wind there was, on this or that side of the face, was its own guide. There was no fear of them getting lost. But in the case of a stranger or one unused to such outdoor conditions, the chances of spending the night shivering up there on the lonely moor were considerable. But half an hour or so later the mist began to thin and the heather ended. The ragged stone wall of the first meadow enclosure rose in front.

"We'll try up the burn for a snipe, Mathers," said Bastwick when they were on the other side of this, "and so home, as old Pepys says."

The stern pile of Wood Bastwick against its background of tall Scotch firs, rose opposite at no

great distance. And further away still, the square tower of Potterton Church slowly rang out five.

There happened to be no snipe lying in the burn. But Bastwick happened to be quite content with his afternoon's doings. The scents and sounds of evening; the moist fragrance of the moss and dripping trees; the fall of dusk, murky and dank as it was, had the charm of contrast, if only to the snug lighted warmth which was awaiting him within. He felt aglow with health and hard exercise; physically he felt all steel and iron; and now, as he took his way up the rough stony path which led to his fortress-like home, he was conscious of a sense of wellbeing and complacency as great as that to which he ever attained.

This was not to last, for the first thing that met his glance as he pushed back the swing gate and gained the rough, stony, hedge-hung road which did duty for the conventional drive, was a car—a great blue car. Bastwick hated motor cars, but if anything he disliked this particular blue car rather more than the rest, and there was something of a frown on his face as he entered the lighted hall.

CHAPTER III

THE HEIR

"HULLO, Uncle Geoff! How are you, old Boss?"

The speaker was a tall youth, who dragged himself leisurely up from the cane chair in which he had been lounging, and extended a hand.

"Oh, middling so so," was the reply, somewhat curt, and not at all as if the meeting afforded unbounded satisfaction to its utterer. "Where are you from last?"

"Oh, home of course. It's beastly slow just now, don't you know."

"H'm," returned the older man, throwing off his waterproof shooting cape, and pulling a chair to the fire. For it was not Bastwick's wont to put himself out in his simple tastes and comforts, the point of which did not in this case appeal to Ethne.

"Why, your feet must be wet through, Uncle Geoff," she expostulated from the chair she was ensconced in and which seemed to stand in suspicious contiguity to that occupied by the young man.

"No, that'll keep. At present I want a sit down for a bit, and—something else," and he jerked a bell handle. "Have a cigar, Derek? Ah, I see you are already supplied in that line. Well, reach

me down one, there's a good fellow, as you are still on your pins, and I'm not. Have a whisky and soda?" as at that moment the butler entered bearing that refreshment.

"Well—er—thanks, Uncle Geoff, I've just had tea. But—er—I don't think it'll hurt me. Thanks —I will."

The other had no doubt but that he would. This young pup he full well knew could carry just as much as was good for him, and more, for his tender age; still he could not be inhospitable in his own house.

"What was the bag, old Boss?" flinging one long leg over the arm of his chair and gulping down half his peg.

Bastwick was nearly not answering. He intensely disliked this free and easy way in which his nephew had got into of addressing him—by the way Derek Hilton really was his nephew. Incidentally he disliked several other things about that self-sufficient youth. He disliked the way in which the latter would come over at all times and seasons on his own initiative and make himself more than thoroughly at home: in short "take charge," as Bastwick sarcastically put it. He disliked intensely the symptoms of a fast and furious flirtation which his nephew was beginning to set up with Ethne. He disliked intensely the idea that Derek Hilton would one day come into Wood Bastwick, but what he disliked most of all, was Derek Hilton himself. And yet they say that "blood is thicker than water."

We have said that Geoffrey Bastwick looked older than his actual age. Middle age is an elastic term which may mean anything from forty to

seventy. Bastwick was just touching on its nearer fringe, which perhaps rendered him more intolerant of the bumptiousness of a younger generation. And of this he had some time since decided that Derek was a first-class personification.

The hall lounge at Wood Bastwick was the ideal of snugness. It was low-ceiled, with broad oak beams, and utterly impervious to draught. A roaring fire blazed up the chimney and now, after the mist and damp and dust without, it seemed to its owner tenfold more snug. Which latter qualification, however, was impaired by the presence of his young kinsman and, perforce, heir. He said very little, leaving the conversation to the two younger ones, over one of whom, and that not the male one, seemed to have come a frost. Then, having smoked through his cigar, he went out.

"Old Boss's liver wrong to-day?" edging his chair a couple of inches nearer to that of Ethne. "Why, he's like a bear with a sore head."

"Shut up, Derek, I'm not going to have you talk of Uncle Geoff like that, and you've no business to."

"Oh, I don't know, I don't owe him anything——"

"But I do," quickly put in the girl. "Isn't that enough."

"Oh, for you, perhaps, but what's he ever done for me? Nothing, I'm a mere accidental unpleasantness to him, but fortunately I can do without."

"Lucky you," she answered. "Oh, I don't mean what that sounds like, I mean that it's a great thing to be independent; not that I feel the want of it. But you come over here pretty often, don't you? That looks as if you rather liked it. Well, then,

what's the matter with Uncle Geoff in that case ? "

The youth got up and took a stride or two up and down the floor, then he flung himself into the chair again and edged it another inch nearer.

" Good Lord, Ethne," he burst out, reaching forth and seizing her hand, " what on earth do you suppose I come over here pretty often for ? "

" Oh, I don't know. It's an object for a motor ride, I suppose, and the shoot isn't bad, and we do you pretty well when you do come," she concluded mischievously.

" You know that it's nothing of the kind," he retorted half angrily, holding tighter the hand, which, incidentally, she had not withdrawn. " You know it's to see you."

Ethne coloured slightly and looked as if she didn't know quite what to say. The boy was extraordinarily handsome in his tall, fair, Anglo-Saxon type, and he had an engaging way of his own with women ; with women of more experience and far better equipped for the fray than Ethne. She took refuge in banality, eke slang.

" Bosh," was the one word her pretty lips framed in reply, but her equally pretty eyes softened as they met his. She had no objection whatever to this sort of incipient wooing, and after all life was a trifle dull at times. Then she deemed it her duty to begin something of a lecture.

" You know, Derek," she said, " you can be rather trying when you like ; in short, my dear boy, you haven't the gumption of a caterpillar."

" Oh, I say, come now ; that's coming it rather rough, don't you know ? What have I done ? "

"It isn't what you've done, it's what you haven't done," returned the girl. "You're not considerate, for one thing, and people like Uncle Geoff want to be considered. I understand that, and that's why we get on so jolly well, he and I; but you young pups think that the world was built to revolve round *you*. In short, you've no consideration at all for your elders."

"Oh, I say," repeated the youth, "the old Boss isn't so very old, come now."

"Then why do you call him so," was the obvious retort. "Perhaps he's at the very time of life when people don't like to be reminded of it. In fact, I can see he doesn't."

"Well, I don't know what I've done," grumbled the other, growing sullen. "Best thing I can do is to take myself off."

"But I thought you had come over to see me," said Ethne sweetly.

"Well, here I am."

"Aren't you going to stop and dine."

In a moment Derek's sullenness vanished. This was just the thing he did want to do, and he said so in somewhat extravagant terms.

"Then that's settled," said Ethne. "Now be nice to Uncle Geoff, won't you? and don't start ramming all your newly fledged opinions down his throat directly we get to table, as you generally do."

He got up and took a turn or two up and down the floor, and looked offended again.

"Upon my word, Ethne, you seem to have made a discovery," he said huffily.

"Oh dear no," was the equable answer. "For

some time past I have been intending to give you a talking to on this head, and it strikes me that the right moment has arrived. So there you are."

Derek lighted a cigarette and threw the match into the fire with a quick peevish movement.

"Oh, very well," he said, "I'll see if I can't meet your very clearly expressed wishes."

"That's right," she rejoined serenely. "Nothing like having our wishes met, whether clearly expressed or not. Mine, I believe, are occasionally not, but that's a detail."

He looked at her still resentfully, but—she was very pretty, so instead of uttering something stinging, he flung himself into his chair again beside her, and edged that article of furniture still one more inch nearer.

They made a comely sight, these two young people, seated there in the cheerful glow. The one, his temporary ill humour all vanished, now talking to the other in decidedly not everyday tones; a well matched pair a stray observer would have said, but a believer in Nature's contrasts would have hesitated. They were too much of the same type and colouring, blue-eyed, fair-haired—in fact, too much alike. So thought one observer who did believe in Nature's contrasts as he came in for a moment to look for a newspaper and then went out again immediately. The sight to him was not a comely one; in fact, it did not please him at all.

Geoffrey Bastwick's thoughts were not of the best as he regained his study, and he did not begin to read the newspaper he had just fetched but sat thinking. He was not a selfish man as men go, but here

was this girl who brightened his home, and of whom in his grim way he had become exceedingly fond, listening to the first whippersnapper who came along, and he knew what the end of that spelt. Only a question of time, probably not a long time either, and he would be alone again. Well, of course, that was only to be expected, but not so soon, he had allowed himself to hope.

Now he owned to himself that part of the cause of his dislike for his nephew had been this very thing. Hitherto he had only treated it as a contingency; possibly a remote one, now he had seen enough during that brief glance in on the pair to convince him it was by no means a remote one. Still the newspaper lay on the ground beside him unread, and all sorts of unpleasant forecastings chased each other through his mind more and more. That is the worst of introspection if of an unpleasant nature; and introspection is rarely otherwise. It has such a knack of magnifying and multiplying at a sort of compound interest rate.

He got up and paced the room three or four times, then taking a pipe from the mantelpiece filled and lighted it. The murmur of the two young voices reached him through the silence of the house. Then this ceased and there came a tap at the door.

"Well, what is it, Ethne?" he said, as the girl entered. "Has that young pup condescended to take himself off at last?"

"No. He's going to dine."

"Oh, that of course; but he's begun to take charge here rather prematurely I think."

"Now, dear, don't be nasty," said Ethne, taking

hold of the lapels of his coat collar. "He didn't ask himself, you know. I asked him. I couldn't do otherwise, and no one is more severe on inhospitality than you are, you know."

"Well, there's something in that, I admit," said Bastwick, "and no one is more severe on nerve-raspers than I am, and this whelp gets on my nerves quite all the time. He's got his murdering beastly express engine, why the devil can't he get on it, and take himself off?"

"No, now, dear, don't be so savage, and all about nothing," went on the girl pleadingly, shaking him gently by the shoulders with her long light hands. "And, what does it matter to you and me?"

He looked down into the upturned face and kissed it.

"Oh, you'd soothe the devil himself if you had the talking to him," he said. "Well, keep your pup and feed him, for, as you say, what does it matter?"

Whether it was that Ethne's lecture had borne fruit may be left in the realm of conjecture, but from its point of moralizing Derek's demeanour was exemplary. He entirely forbore to controvert his uncle's expressed opinions in his usual high and mighty fashion; in fact, on an occasion or two he even allowed himself to defer to them. Youth, at any rate male youth, is rarely endowed with tact, reflected his said relative, wherefore this unwonted ingratiation stirred up all his former suspicions, in that it must be due to an object. But he let none of

this appear, and to all outward appearance they were a very cosy trio indeed seated at that table.

They talked of sport and other things; Ethne, looking charming at her end of the table, bearing her full and intelligent share.

"You needn't clear out, child," said Bastwick, as she rose at the end of dinner, "and yet in a way you ought, because we oughtn't to want our dry port sweetened by your presence. Ha, ha!"

"Hullo, Uncle Geoff, why that's not half bad," cried Derek; "upon my soul, it isn't. I must remember that."

"And retail it as your own," said Ethne slyly.

"Why, that of course," was the characteristic answer. "Couldn't let a good thing like that go unpirated."

Bastwick laughed.

"Well, I'll make you a present of it, Derek, and welcome, on condition that you don't let me into the nature of your pals' comments when you spring it on them." And so one thing led to another in the matter of chaff, and even Bastwick was allowing himself to form an idea that Derek was not such a bad sort of pup after all—as long as you weren't left alone with him.

They adjourned to the billiard room, and cigars, and even here Derek kept up his best behaviour, allowing his uncle to beat him in two games out of three, though this was done with an obviousness which deepened that worthy's suspicions still more. At length it became time to start home.

But on going to the front door with that intent, Derek, reckless and slap-dash driver that he was,

fired off a whistle of consternation. For an opaque white mist lay upon everything, so thick indeed, that literally one could hardly see one's hand in front of one's nose.

"Here's a holy joke," he said, turning to his uncle. "What on earth's to be done? I'm all alone. I'm changing my 'shover,' you know, so I've no one to help in case of accidents."

"Well, there are plenty of beds upstairs," said Bastwick, "as you ought to know by this time."

"Oh, I say, thanks, but if it won't be a bore to you." Here again was the unwonted and deferential note. Bastwick smiled to himself, and his suspicions deepened further still.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUGGESTION

THE night of mist and rain gave way to a lovely morning. Not a cloud was in the sky, but the mist was rolling away in a curtain to the high ground of the moors. Down in the meadow valley the grass glittered and sparkled as with a diamond carpet. The bracing northern air seemed charged with health and life-giving properties; clear, invigorating as that of the Alps.

So thought Derek Hilton as he stepped briskly forth into the light and sparkle, with the firm tread and springy elasticity of youth. He took a few paces up the terrace in front of the house, also a quick upward glance at one of the windows of the same.

"Gorgeous, by Jove," he ejaculated to himself. Then he turned back into the lounge, but it looked, in comparison with the snug glow of the previous night, like a theatre at 11 a.m.—depressing.

Then some one came in, and it looked depressing no longer.

"Well? Aren't I punctual to time?" said Ethne, putting the finishing touch to the buttoning up of a pair of warm gloves and taking a walking-stick from the umbrella stand.

"To the minute," he said, noting, with ill-concealed admiration, the apparition before him. She looked so neat and bright and sparkling in the freshness of morning; such an embodiment of radiant health and spirits; in fact, a typical English girl who leads a clear, unaffected country life, than which there is no more attractive being in the world.

By her first question it is obvious that these two young people had set up some kind of understanding, which understanding spelt an early walk before breakfast, weather permitting; and as we have seen, weather did permit. So they stepped out briskly down the field path and over the bridge of the trout stream now running in spate. Here they paused a moment, while of course the conversation turned on the past fishing season. It may be that it was soon destined to turn on something else.

On the edge of the moor was a tumbled mass of rock slab, and here Derek proposed they should sit down and have a rest. They were quite a little way from the house now. Then Ethne suddenly became aware that her companion's manner had undergone a change. A sort of constraint had crept into it, and as there is nothing more catching than constraint, something of the same kind infused itself into hers, wherefore it is not surprising that their conversation should become jerky, then cease altogether.

Ethne was the first to break the silence.

"We'd better be moving on," she said; "it's beginning to feel cold. This isn't summer, you know."

"Well—no certainly—er—it does—er—seem rather frosty," he answered with meaning. "What's the matter with you, Ethne?"

"What's the matter with *you*?" she replied, tracing devices in the moist peat with her stick.

The youth jumped to his feet with an exclamation of impatience.

"Oh, you know well enough what's the matter with me," he answered. "You're the matter with me. You, *you*."

"Me, *me*?" she echoed, and there was a gleam of mischief in the limpid blue eyes which turned up innocently but wholly enthrallingly to his. "Well, what have *I* got to do with it?" It was really very provoking of Ethne, but for the life of her she could not resist the mischievous impulse.

"Now look here. Let's be serious," he burst forth, sitting down again, and seizing one of her hands in both of his. "What did I tell you last night, when you said I was over here pretty often? Didn't I tell you that it was to see you, and for no other reason. Well, I want to see you always, Ethne darling. In short, I want you altogether, you understand."

Perhaps the words were lame or lamely put; perhaps that end of the day is not the best time for enunciating sentiment. It dawned upon Ethne that she was actually receiving a proposal, incidentally the first one she had ever had and—the bathos of it—it sounded to her, if anything, rather ridiculous. She knew that Derek had tried to fancy himself in love with her in a flirtatious kind of way; indeed, she was far from sure that it was anything more serious now, and if it was she did not feel in the least inclined to respond. In fact, she did not know what to say in the least; so she said nothing.

"Well?" he went on. "What do you say?—Oh, damn!"

This was evoked by the sudden unexpected, and, to one of the two, wholly unwelcome apparition of Mathers, the keeper, with a gun and a dog. The latter, a handsome black retriever, ran straight to the pair, wagging his brush with all the chumminess of his kind.

Ethne welcomed him effusively, patting the black, glossy head. At any rate the interruption gave her time to collect her thoughts, if she needed it, and she was by no means certain that she did.

The keeper stood chatting about the weather, and the shooting and other topics of kindred and genial nature, blissfully unaware that Derek was all the time wishing him at the devil. But Ethne responded to these topics with a zest that to her was entirely unwonted. At last the man went on his way.

Could any interruption have been more ill-timed? It had knocked all the dignity and possible pathos out of a psychological situation. Derek felt that he was in the position of "as you were." He felt baited and consequently savage; a very bad frame of mind indeed for a man desirous of pressing an answer to a proposal.

"You hadn't answered my question," he resumed, "when that thick-headed yokel blundered in on us."

She looked at him for a minute. Then—

"I don't think I'm taking your question seriously, Derek," she said. "We've been thrown together a good bit, and you think more of me than you've any occasion to, if you only knew it. Now, why?"

"You're so devilish pretty for one thing."

Then Ethne rent the crisp, moorland air with a musical, whole-hearted peal of laughter. Her companion did not laugh at all.

"I call that disgusting," he burst forth, a frown and a flush coming into his handsome face. "I don't see why I should be treated like a perfect fool. I don't know that I have made one of myself simply because I threw out—er—a suggestion. Do you?"

"No, I don't," she answered, laying a soothing hand upon his arm. "Far from it. Come. Let's go back."

"I don't see why I should be treated like a perfect fool," Derek had said, but there was no reason why he shouldn't have been so treated, because he was one. It was only natural that he should have been. He had a mother who was a fool before him and no father. She had spoiled him to the top of his bent, from the time he first went to school to the time he left college and afterwards—and this was afterwards, and he was more than ever spoilt. So when Ethne failed to jump at his suggestion that she should be with him always, he was astonished. He thought that she would have jumped at the idea, at any rate he thought she ought to have. But she didn't, wherein the food for astonishment lay. He felt illused, unappreciated; an unwonted feeling with him, as far as the opposite sex was concerned.

But the worst of it was, that as far as the opposite sex was concerned such appreciation was for permanent alliance purposes undesirable. He had been attracted by Ethne's fresh, clean run, country attractiveness in a totally different manner and in

contrast to those other attractions. He had seen a great deal of her of late and had been drawn to her more and more, while—not completely making up his mind to forego those other contrasting attractions. And now she had snubbed him, snubbed him unmistakably, had shown herself utterly indifferent to the contemplation of such an alternative as to whether he were alive or not. This was clean outside his experience, yet not. There had been one similar occasion and remembering it he wilted.

Now, complying with her suggestion that they should go back, he walked down the heather beside her in silence. The cock grouse were crowing joyously, in greeting perhaps to a perfectly unwonted allowance of sunlight. A covey of partridges sprung up in the grass meadow in front, on the other side of the sad stone-packed wall. Derek vaulted over the same with the easy springiness of long, lithe, sinewy youth, then stood to help his companion over. She blundered in the process of helping and half fell right on to his shoulder—one shoulder—not an uncommon situation in fiction, nor softly be it whispered, in fact. But Derek—a very uncommon situation in fiction—did not take advantage of an opportunity. He felt disgusted, his pride had been hurt. Yet Ethne looked all alluring in her golden-haired, sun-kissed beauty, but she was not alluring towards him, which counted far more than half. Wherein perhaps he showed sense.

Bastwick, standing in his bright, sun-flooded bedroom window shaving, was spectating these two figures drawing nearer and nearer to the steep scarp

on which the house stood, and the sight was by no means pleasing to him, for he read one meaning into it, and that the old tin-pot commonplace, old-as-the-world meaning, but to him it read: "I shall be left alone soon." In confirmation of which he noted as the two drew nearer and nearer, the bright sparkling animation in the girl's face as she talked and laughed; but what he failed to note was, that there was no corresponding animation in the face of her companion.

Yet the sun flooded in, and he gazed forth upon a half circle of the ground he loved so well, which was his own for life, and yet that somehow did not cheer him as it was wont to do. It is astonishing how weather affects our temperament, especially the first thing in the morning, yet, in his case, even that failed. It had suddenly been brought home to him that things had reached a crisis between these two. He would soon be left alone. No more cheering companionship to look forward to when he came down in the morning, throughout the day and throughout a long, snug, cosy evening, and throughout the next day and the day after that. He would be left alone.

It was not all selfishness either. He fully recognized that this was bound to come, but—not so soon.

"Well, you two," said Bastwick, as they sat down to the breakfast table, the said "two" glowing with health and the stamp of radiant outdoor exercise; himself no less healthy and brown, mainly with the sun which never shone over old England. "You seem to have had a good step out."

"Oh, not so far, Uncle Geoff," answered Ethne. "We only got to Semon's Slabs and then sat down."

Her face was sparkling with mischief. She couldn't help it, but Derek was growling to himself that it was in devilish bad taste, considering all that had been said there.

"Then sat down?" repeated Bastwick. "Semon's Slabs must have afforded a precious cold seat on a morning like this. Ho, ho! What's this? Bah! post! Post is the curse of creation. I was in a place once where you didn't get a post more than once a fortnight. Life was worth living there."

He made hay disgustedly with a pile of correspondence at his elbow. "Now I daresay Derek, you'd be disgusted if you didn't get five posts a day, conveying engagements and love letters, and all that sort of thing. But as for me—pooh! bah! I'd gladly not see a cancelled stamp or postmark once a month."

"Oh, well, Uncle Geoff," answered the other gaily. "I more than threequarters agree with you, because one gets duns sometimes. But the other quarter—ha, ha! we'll leave open. Still, as you say, it's capable of being a beastly nuisance." Then somehow the three subsided into silence. Bastwick never felt talkative the first thing in the morning. Derek was thinking over what had gone before, and that made him taciturn. While Ethne could not talk to two unresponsive people. So they cracked their eggs and chipped up their too much frizzled bacon in silence.

In the course of which negative process, Bastwick mechanically moved his hand, with the result that the pile of correspondence which he had pushed aside disgustedly became scattered on the floor. He turned to look at it, also disgustedly, and thinking it

would bear picking up afterwards by some one or other, when one item of the same caught his glance. It seemed to have an effect ; not exactly an electrical effect, for Bastwick was far too much master of his emotions to give way to such. He went on with his breakfast, and answered monosyllabically and mechanically to any remark on the part of the other two.

For there was a handwriting in that pile of correspondence, a handwriting which he had not seen for years, and which he had never expected to see again, and now that he saw it he was by no means glad that he had seen it. Yet there it lay on the floor beside him, staring at him like an eye. All he had to do was to reach down and open it. But he let it lie.

CHAPTER V

THE LETTER

"WANT to take the gun out, Derek?" said Bastwick, as he got up from table; "because if so you'll have to take it out by yourself with Mathers."

"Oh, thanks, I think I rather should." The speaker in reality was revolving a crafty plan, which all of a sudden flashed into his mind. If he went out by himself he might contrive so to prolong the day as to come back late, late enough for a repetition it might be, of last night's thick mist, then it would be hard if he could not manage to work in another night at Wood Bastwick. But he feigned suitable regret that his relative could not accompany him.

"I may join you after lunch," replied the said relative, knowing perfectly well that he meant to do nothing of the kind.

"I say, Ethne, won't you come?" said Derek. "A jolly good tramp over the moor will do you all the good in the world; besides, think how much straighter I shall hold, with you for critic."

Now this was just one of those sayings and doings on the part of his nephew which Bastwick particularly resented. That this cub should have

the unparalleled impudence to start coolly fixing up arrangements over his head in his own house was not to be tolerated. Of course it never occurred to this self-sufficient youth that the girl might be wanted at home. It was enough that she should be at the beck and call of his lordly will and pleasure.

Ethne shook her head.

"I've had enough walking this morning already," and added mischievously, "Mathers 'll make a very good substitute. He's far more amusing in his dry Scottish way than plain me."

Derek made no reply, unless it was to look sulky. He went out of the room without a word. Bastwick looked after him and shook his head.

"Nice promising whelp," he remarked. "But, then, his mother was a fool before him." Whereby it is manifest that the speaker had no high opinion of, and no particular affection for, one of his very few near relatives, Derek's minor parent to wit.

"I think you are rather hard on him, Uncle Geoff," urged Ethne.

"Oh, do you? Now you've no business to take any one's side against me," was the answer, all affectionately, half playfully. "But well, in this case, h'm——" and he stood looking at her with his keen steadfast glance, which had the effect—remembering what had occurred that morning—of bringing the colour to her cheeks. Noting this, Bastwick turned away, feeling not pleased. But of this Ethne was in blissful ignorance. "I'm going to tackle correspondence," he said over his shoulder, "the usual boring correspondence," wearily. Then becoming suddenly emphatic, "Oh, and I don't

want to be disturbed by anybody on any pretext whatever."

He went into the library and shut the door. From where he sat he could see the figures of his nephew and the keeper growing smaller and smaller towards the edge of the moor. But his correspondence lay before him untouched. He was thinking not of it but of Ethne. Was he always to be left —in this instance for a brainless whelp whom he ought never to have made free of the house at all. But he did not resent it on the girl; on the contrary, the prospect of losing her seemed to deepen his affection for her to an extent to which he never should have thought possible. The hideous gargoyle-like face of the carved head opposite seemed to intensify its malign, demoniacal leer; seemed to take life as it glared at him.

Mechanically he turned over his correspondence, seeing none of it, but beneath it all lay one letter, the letter which had fallen on the floor in the dining-room, and which he had not then even taken the trouble to pick up. His glance at this as it lay before him was not mechanical at all, it was rather set. Still he made no move towards opening the envelope.

Should he open the envelope? Would it not be better to throw it in the fire unopened and remain in ignorance of its contents? Such could only be disquieting whatever they were. He had attained a certain amount of contentment, why disturb it? That was sound philosophy.

Eight years had gone by since he had beheld the writer of that letter, and then the last glance of his eyes had been one of black, bitter anger and of hate.

Eight long years, and the same had been smouldering in his heart but never extinguished. He wondered if by some strange process of psychic reflection his thoughts had lent an additional malevolence to the stare of the hideous dragon head opposite.

He held the envelope for a moment irresolute, then took a paper cutter and slit it open. The enclosure, written in rather a large bold hand, was not a very bulky one and did not promise great length. It was headed with an Australian address which seemed to consist mainly of duplicated o's. Its date was some three months previously.

"I don't know whether you care to hear from me again, dear Geoffrey, or even whether you care to hear about me, let alone whether I am alive or dead, but I'm going to chance it. Probably you think the latter, possibly hope it, for which I shouldn't blame you in the least. I treated you abominably at that time I know; in fact, I've known it almost ever since. But life for me hasn't been a dream of delight by any means: it has been a hard roughening affair, full of disillusioning all along the line; in fact, I'm heartily sick of it.

"I'm just on the point of leaving for England, where I have no friends and hardly a relation except yourself, and you I want to see very much indeed, though it would be small wonder if you hardly believed it or didn't believe it at all. But it's true all the same. In all my ups and downs I've always kept a soft sad recollection of you, the only one in the world so different to others; and so completely and entirely reliable, and as for the times at dear old

Wood Bastwick why they seem like another life. But the day of all, which stands out, and always will stand out, is that day we were together at Cronshaw's Leap. Well, well, I expect you've not done hating my memory by this or, worse still, have come to the conclusion long since that it is not worth hating; but if you only knew it, and would believe it, I am most intensely longing to see you and dear old Wood Bastwick again. I ought to be landing in England in about ten weeks from now, and this address will find me." Here followed the address of a firm of shipowners who ran an irregular line to the Antipodes. The reader noted the characteristic feminine omission of such a trifling detail as the name of the ship.

"I've come back as I went away," the letter went on, "except for the hardening and disillusioning effects of seven—or is it eight?—years in between, and that amount of time knocked off life. But if you only knew how intensely I'm hoping, almost praying, that I may find words of welcome from you, whose love I once threw away in a passing fit of insanity, for I can call it nothing less, I think even you could bring yourself to let bygones be bygones.

"One whom you once loved,

"LELAND GORING."

Bastwick did not move. He might have been turned to iron. Presently he did move, but the movement was a very slight one, that of dropping the letter on to the table in front of him. He still sat staring at it. What a voice out of the past those few words contained. What a voice out of the grave

rather, for in truth they seemed to sound from a world beyond. Anger and hate, yes, such had been smouldering within him for all these years. And now a mere touch, a mere puff of the past, well——

He did not even begin to think at that moment whether he would send the answer pleaded for, or the answer that was not pleaded for, or no answer at all. He simply thought of nothing, nothing definite that is. He sat staring at this writing which he had not seen for years. It had not changed. Every line and stroke was exactly the same; if corroboration were needed, why there in the drawer opposite him was its counterpart of eight years' before. Had she who penned it changed in appearance, he found himself wondering. And then he did not exactly start, but stared harder. He had been unconsciously fingering the sheets of the letter, and now something dropped from between them. It was an ordinary unmounted small-sized kodak portrait, evidently a snapshot. He took a large reading magnifier that was lying on the table and scrutinized it closely. Yes, there was a change. He was not sure whether it was for the worse. Eight years had gone over the head of the original of the portrait, but then eight years had gone over his own head too.

For quite a long time he sat studying it. Taken under an Australian sun it was quite clear for its size, though a large hat partly shaded the face. But had it been taken for him?

With a quick movement, as though breaking a spell, he got up and began pacing the room. Then again he looked at the date of the letter. In a

month from now she would be here. A month—one short month. Could it have been, had he been perfectly candid with himself, that at that psychological moment, it seemed that it might be rather a long month? Well, well, there would be plenty of scope for psychology between this and then. And looking up, he could have sworn that the repulsive gargoyle-like head was positively and fiendishly grinning,

It was obvious from the foregoing that Geoffrey Bastwick of Wood Bastwick and Bastwick Carrs, notwithstanding other highly desirable qualities, had the makings in him of a one idea-ed man, and a one idea may easily develop into an obsession, to the more or less gradual exclusion of any and every other idea, which may easily become a more or less incipient phase of lunacy. This tragedy of his life had been to him such an idea. He had taken it as few take it—badly, very badly. With him its effects had lasted as they last with the few, the very few. And now, the whole seemed in danger of a re-stirring; and what would be the upshot of such, why Heaven alone knew.

The luncheon bell rang, but the master of the house did not appear. Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes. Still the same. The butler gently suggested to Ethne that perhaps Mr. Bastwick had not heard the bell, or might have been tired and dropped into a doze. Should he go and see?

"Certainly not, Cherriman," answered the girl with emphasis. "When Mr. Bastwick says he is not to be disturbed, you know he isn't."

"Quite right, miss," assented the man with a deferential smile. And Ethne went into lunch alone. It was not until she was more than half way through that her relative joined her. She started at his appearance. Be it remembered that neither she nor Derek had noted anything unusual about the incident of the fallen letter.

"Why, Uncle Geoff," she said, "you are looking strange. You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Do I?" he answered whimsically, while to himself he thought, "Perhaps I have."

CHAPTER VI

THE GIBBET

BASTWICK sat long over his lunch, but he did not say much. Ethne sat too; it did not follow because she had finished hers, she must jump up and rush away somewhere, as the way with some unthinking people is. She had noticed a difference in him since his all-the-morning imposed seclusion, wherefore she talked in an instinctively soothing way, as the way of most unthinking people is not. She strove to draw him out of himself. A curious vein had begun to develop in Ethne. By a kind of inspiration she had begun to study her relative. By a kind of intuition she had discovered a sympathy that had so far been wanting. In so doing by a kind of new development she found herself conscious of a growing admiration for her said relative such as had not found root in her mind before. Now it had, and the consciousness was a curious one. She thought of Derek and his egregious proposal that morning; for she supposed it was a proposal. She thought of his conceit, and his wounded self-conceit, and such it seemed, for there was more huffiness about it than disappointment, and something moved her to draw a contrast. She looked across at her

relative, strong, self-contained; and mentally drew another contrast. One, flighty, pillar-to-post, froth, the other, well—strong, self-contained; above all, strong.

"You needn't wait unless you like, Ethne," said Bastwick, filling up a glass of port. "I know women hate sitting at table when once they've finished themselves." It was a curious feature about Bastwick that for all the years that Ethne had been living with him, there were times when he forgot that she was not almost a stranger, and here came in a little touch of this.

"Why, what does it matter, Uncle Geoff," she answered in her soft, deep voice. "Why on earth should I want to leave you alone? I've nothing desperately important on hand."

"All right then, dear. Sit tight and yarn to me as long as you like," he rejoined, now for his part conscious of a curious instinctive growing touch of sympathy between them, and rather appreciating it. "What have you been doing with yourself all the morning? Regretting you didn't go out with Derek?"

"No. A very little of Derek goes a very long way."

Bastwick looked up and whistled.

"Oh–h," he said. "It struck me that a very great deal of Derek went a very short way—from you last night out in the lounge; I'm talking topographically, you know. For instance, there was just one inch between both your chairs when I came in to look for that paper; "and his keen eyes were bent upon her face.

She did not, however, change colour. This time she only laughed.

"Oh, he's an absurd boy," she said. "Why I was lecturing him within an inch of his life."

"Oh, you were. And how did he take it?"

"Snuffily."

"No doubt he did. He's a sort of youth that has not been half enough kicked, unfortunately when he was at school he was always too big to be half enough kicked, and always has been since. But I thought you and he were getting a bit thick."

"Well then, dear, you thought jolly well wrong, that's all. Why, he's only a conceited bull pup who thinks every girl he condescends to look at is ready to fall at his feet, and this girl is not in the least ready to fall at his feet."

Bastwick laughed. He looked at the speaker sitting there opposite him, and a new idea came into his mind, Ethne was showing character; also, Nature's contrast was beginning to revolt. These two young people were alike in type, entirely alike, although very remotely connected. It had struck him before, observing them, that there was not sufficient of Nature's contrast, the same colouring, the same type. That kind of mating never did answer.

Bastwick was conscious of a vast relief. So he was not going to be left alone after all; the good-humoured but decisive contempt with which Ethne had referred to Derek spoke everything. He was not going to be left, and with the thought came that of the letter he had been reading and pondering over the whole morning.

Again he shot a keen straight glance at the girl sitting opposite him. She was used to such. It did not disconcert her in the least, for there was always a kindly, not to say affectionate, manner underlying it. It seemed that he saw some new development in her; the growth of character, possibly the growth of attractiveness to the outside and physical eye. It was strange that the effect of his closeted morning in the library, should suddenly have started him on this contrast, but it had.

"What do you say to a stroll out?" he said, pushing back his chair and getting up. "It is growing latish, and we might stroll up to The Gibbet and see how the boy has been getting along. I told him to wind up his shoot there; it's jolly well dark at four."

"Why yes, that'll be first-rate," she answered brightly. "In ten minutes?"

"That's about it."

She was ready for him in the hall lounge punctual to the time named—punctual. This set him thinking. What he thought does not matter now, but it may presently.

He looked at her approvingly, in her neat, tailor-made, short-skirted costume, so workman-like for cross-country walking, as they set out. As he had said it grew dusk at four, and it was considerably after three. They took their way down the steep meadows that fell away from Wood Bastwick, chatting lightly on all sorts of subjects; for the time being Bastwick had almost dismissed the subject of the letter from his thoughts, and ease and contentment of mind were upon him. All unconsciously

to himself he was between a whirl of contrasts. He knew that at present he was quite happy in this child's companionship, why then bother about any consideration outside?

They got through a rickety gate in the turf-surmounted wall of the last meadow and struck on to the open moor. A narrow sheep path led up between the now dead heather. The air had grown filmy. It looked as if the mist of the evening before was going to settle down again. A quick, double, distant report cracked out through it.

"Ho, ho," chuckled Bastwick. "That's Derek —missing."

Ethne laughed with a spice of malice; the point of the joke being that Derek, with all his Adonis-like attributes, was not a first-rate shot. Incidentally it was a secret sore point with him, but then so it is with others of us.

The mist began to creep further down, but not thickly. Twenty minutes more of walking, or rather climbing, and they came upon a ridge. What was this? An object stood against the sky, a curious object, an unwonted object. A tall strong square post, rising to the height of some thirty feet. Its base was studded with large, thick-headed nails, for a species of rude ornamentation presumably, for they could be of no earthly use. At the apex of this a transverse beam, from the end of which dangled a board, for all the world like the sign of a roadside inn, bearing a rude and ghastly portrayal of a human face. This was "The Gibbet" to which we heard Bastwick refer as the objective of their walk. This gibbet was one of the few remaining in England. It

was a relic of the good old barbarous times when people were hanged for stealing twopence halfpenny in this very Christian land, and hung up in chains and an iron cage to putrefy, having previously been more or less uncomfortably executed in the nearest county town—incidentally in those days as in these, we sent out missionaries and armies to convert and repress this or that heathen king, who put his subjects out of the way by a clean stroke of the knobstick for very much more serious offences.

The last who had adorned this delectable tree, had been hung for a far more serious offence—in short, murder. He was a travelling gipsy tinker, and together with two women, his companions, had broken one night into the old peel house down there on the moor side and barbarously done to death the ancient couple inhabiting it, to whom popular repute accredited hoarded wealth. All three having been duly executed at the county town, the remains of the principal actor had been carted up here and gibbeted, as a deterrent to other potential evil-doers, likewise a certain deterrent to the said old peel house ever being inhabited again; for naturally, with such a gruesome reminder of the tragedy which had taken place within its walls, standing out clear against the sky, not one of the country folk could be induced to occupy it, even rent free. It may readily be imagined too that weird and wonderful tales, by no means losing with time, were about; how the fell tragedy would be re-enacted on the yearly occurrence of the event, though as to the date of that cheerful anniversary the countryside had the mistiest of ideas. Bastwick knew, because the affair was set

forth in some volumes of old chronicle which stood on his library shelf. But he was nearly the only one who did.

There was a tradition that any one visiting The Gibbet on the occasion of such anniversary and standing beneath the beam, should have it within his or her power to compass within the year the death of any one whom he or she should choose to name, or in the event of their failing to formulate any such wish, disaster of the most sinister kind would overtake themselves.

The old peel house was named Bastwick Carrs, and to it some ground was attached which formed part of the Wood Bastwick estate. The house itself was almost a tumble-down ruin, yet not quite, for Bastwick kept it in some sort of repair, by reason of its antiquarian interest.

"We are here first," said the latter, as the two approached this grim signpost, and there was no appearance of Derek or the keeper. "Well, we may as well sit down." He was about to subside into the heather, and rest his back against the tall post, when Ethne suddenly seized his arm and held it as though to drag him the other way.

"Hullo, what's up? Has the great god Derek condescended to heave in sight yet?"

"No, no. As if that mattered," she answered hurriedly. "But you were going right under the beam."

"Well, what if I was? I've been under it heaps of times before."

"But," went on the girl eagerly, "this is the day."

"The day? Ah, I see," repeated Bastwick. "Ho! ho! ho! here goes then. I don't take any of these insane country superstitions, and I am surprised that you do, dear; but being a feminine, I suppose you can't help it! So this is the day, is it?"

"Yes, and it's just as well to be on the safe side," she answered seriously. "Things do happen, however much you may scoff at them."

"Oh, yes, they do," he assented. "There may be a railway accident or a theatre fire by next week, but it won't be caused by my standing under any particular stick of wood. Ah, here comes our noble shooter at last," as the forms of Derek and the keeper hove in sight over the next ridge. Then whimsically, "Here, for goodness' sake, Ethne, don't let Derek stand under the said stick of wood, or he'll be bossing the show at Wood stick —no, I mean Wood Bastwick—by this time next year."

Ethne shook her head.

"'Not strong,' as the French say," she answered, "but not bad for a well meant attempt. Still, I wish you wouldn't make those ghastly jokes," with a pressure of his arm, "I don't half like them."

"You ought to like every joke perpetrated by me," he laughed, "ghastly or otherwise. Well, to humour you I'll forego my chairback and squat in the open heather. Though in doing so I feel I am pandering disgracefully to superstition. By the way, Mathers doesn't look as if he was groaning under his load," he added whimsically, as the two came once more in sight, quite near now.

"That means that Derek will be in a bad temper," said Ethne with a laugh.

"I shouldn't wonder," assented her relative. "The young pup up-to-date does not make a graceful loser. If he doesn't break the bank every time he fancies himself aggrieved, and this one in particular is certainly built that way. Well, Derek, what sport?"

"Oh, rotten, rotten."

"There'll be plenty of birrds, sir, I'm thinkin'," cut in Mathers, who by no means relished this implied reflection on his professional results. But Derek looked sulky and Bastwick looked whimsical —at Ethne. Mathers was turning out the bag.

"Seven brace and a half, and two hares," counted Bastwick. "Oh, come, Derek, you haven't done so badly—for you," he mentally added. But the other was not mollified. He mumbled something about being off his shoot as he filled and lighted a pipe. He began to walk up and down, holding his gun anyhow; the process of his walk taking him several times underneath the beam of the gallows. If he had heard the popular superstition, he was treating it with the contempt which it really deserved, wherein for once omniscient pupdom was right. Ethne—woman and therefore superstitious —was contemplating this performance with her heart in her mouth. Mathers, north countryman, and also superstitious, was contemplating it gravely.

"Can't make out why I'm so out of form to-day," went on Derek, haranguing the assemblage of three. "Wasn't I, Mathers?"

"A' weel, sir, A've seen you shoot better," answered the candid but diplomatic Scot.

"Man alive, but we all have our ups and downs in that respect," said Bastwick and—with the words he dropped to the ground as if shot, which but for the breadth of a finger he was. We have said that Derek was handling his gun carelessly and now for some reason or other that gun had gone off, and part of the charge just catching Bastwick's hat, had whirled that essential article of apparel some ten yards away from its wearer's head. In that moment of hideous uncertainty Ethne noticed that Derek was standing right under the gibbet beam. Perhaps the keeper had noticed it too, but if so he said nothing.

"Hullo, steady on," laughed Bastwick, slowly resuming his normal and upright position. Derek was as white as death as he stammered out his ashamed and incoherent apologies. He called himself all the—qualified—fools on earth, yet not quite all, since Ethne was present. But Bastwick only laughed.

"It's a good thing, Derek," he said, "that you *are* so out of form to-day. Never mind. Better luck next time."

Then Ethne started in; and the way in which she went for the offender was a record. She was alternately withering and wrathful. How she did give it to him, with the result that the offender's penitence changed into sulkiness. He had no idea she had such a temper, he blurted out scathingly, but girls nowadays seemed to think they could say anything, by Jove. Whereat Bastwick, putting on the shot-

torn hat which the keeper gravely handed to him, laughed wholeheartedly, not to say significantly. But as they took their way down homewards, he managed to get in a little aside to Ethne.

" It seems I ought to believe in that superstition of yours, dear, especially as the thing is sheer accident—sheer accident, mind."

" Oh, sheer accident ! " she assented indignantly. " But the boy is a fool."

CHAPTER VII

DISAPPROVING DEREK

HISTORY has a knack of repeating itself, which for present purposes may be taken to mean that another thick white mist had crept down from the moors and swirled up from the now marshy meadows that lay like a moat around Wood Bastwick. In the result, by the time that the party got back, and had absorbed the requisite refreshment entailed by—at any rate in the case of one of them—a day on the moors, it would settle down, as thick as, if not thicker than, the evening before.

"Well, Derek? Destiny seems inclined to hold you a prisoner somehow, in this our ancestral donjon keep," said his relative genially. It seemed that he could afford to be genial to Derek now. It might have been partly on account of his casual conversation with Ethne in the morning, or it might have been partly on account of Derek's accidental attempt to blow his head off under the gallows tree in the afternoon, which latter incident appealed satirically to his own whimsical soul. It stood out to him as such a joke. Supposing it had come off? Goodness knows. One man shooting another accidentally is apt to carry its mark for life. One man shooting several purposely, carries no mark at all,

unless perhaps the V.C. or other decorations. One man shooting another accidentally with everything to gain by it. Well, what then? So, on the whole, the joke appealed to him.

Derek was inclined to stand on his sulky dignity. The fact was, he had an uneasy sub-consciousness of being poked fun at, not to say tolerated. So he answered shortly that it did not matter a cent about the mist. He would drive through somehow—with a savage glance at Ethne. What did it matter?

"Matter?" answered Bastwick, kindly satirical. "Man alive, have you no regard for the future of Wood Bastwick? There's a horrid little half-saved rotter not a hundred miles off who'd rejoice like sin and sorrow over the bust up of your beastly murder car, and incidentally you, say, in that uncommonly awkward road-slip a mile beyond Potterton in the mist to-night. Now I think you and I ought to join common forces against him."

It is a curious thing, but Derek was never quite sure whether he liked, or disliked his relative. Sometimes it seemed to be one, sometimes the other, but in each case the emotion was complete, never mixed. In this case it seemed to be the first. When Bastwick chose to be genial, even satirically genial, there was a something about him that was rather difficult to resist, and yet there were times when the other almost hated him. Now, however, the genial element predominated, for the present.

Snug and warm in the hall lounge, it seemed that all unpleasantness was forgotten. Derek—young—spread his long limbs in front of the fire and revelled in an excellent cigar. Ethne, playing around

with tea things, felt equally content, in a physical, purring, catlike contentment which had nothing on earth to do with her companion. Bastwick had gone to the library to investigate his evening correspondence; a process which, as we have seen, he devoutly hated.

These two young people, thus left alone together, did not seem to be improving the occasion at all. The air seemed to be charged with unsympathy, somehow very different to what it had been twenty-four hours ago in the same place and under the same circumstances. Yet both looked the same. Each should have looked equally attractive to the other. Yet——

Derek began, shifting one foot over another.

"What's the matter with you, Ethne? You ragged me like blazes up on the moor a little while ago, and I tell you I didn't like it at all. But haven't you got over it yet?"

"Have you?" she answered evenly.

He jumped in his chair and kicked his legs impatiently. What had come over Ethne? he thought. She had always been rather soothing, even-tempered, hitherto. It began to occur to him dimly—as it had occurred to his older relative, not dimly—that Ethne was beginning to develop character. He was not sure that this was an improvement.

This boy's character was not formed. He had been accustomed to go through life buzzing like a bee from flower to flower, owing to his idiotic and maternal bringing up. He was unaccustomed to be thwarted, let alone snubbed. Now it seemed he was

being subjected to both processes, consequently he turned sulkier than ever. Ethne took up *Country Life* and serenely studied it. The exquisite pictures and delicate renderings of the most entrancing subjects on earth, appealed to her infinitely more than the sulky psychology of any spoiled youth.

Derek kicked one leg over the other several times, and then announced his intention of going to the billiard-room and trying over a few strokes on his own. But if this was meant as an invitation it was not responded to. Ethne still sat immersed in her *Country Life,* in which state Bastwick came in and found her.

"Hullo, where's the boy?" he asked, flinging himself into the said boy's vacated chair.

"Gone to knock the balls about. I didn't go and help him. I'm tired."

"Tired! What, why?" He did not know she had begun the day on a proposal and had spent the rest of the day thinking about it; for a proposal is a proposal, when all's said and done. He didn't know either, that she had been thinking a great deal about *him.*

That ghastly coincidence under "The Gibbet" had started her in this train of thought. What if the muzzle of that young fool's gun had been depressed a couple of inches lower. Heavens on earth! It was not of her snug, peaceful, secure home that Ethne was thinking, as she sat there gazing at her relative with a wholly soft expression in her deep blue eyes. It was a whirl of everything. For the first time in her life she had stood face to face with deadly peril, and a simultaneously miraculous

escape. What if no such escape had been permitted to come off? The horror of it. What sort of a blank would it have left in her life, if this one presence had been blotted out from it? Bastwick was looking at her strangely.

"What's the matter, little girl?" he said, that keen kind glance directed upon her now quivering face. "You don't look yourself."

For answer she broke into a flood of tears. He threw down the pipe he had taken from the mantelpiece to fill, and turned to her with great concern.

"The matter," she answered, striving to suppress her sobs. "The matter? Why, you might have been dead."

"Well, little Ethne, and then? You would have been safe; you're fairly well provided for against a hard, rotten, brutal world, so why bother?"

She dashed back the tears from her eyes with a half frantic gesture.

"Why bother?" she echoed. "Is that all you think about it? No, this is dreadful that you should think I only care about you for how I am circumstanced."

"Well, don't you?" but there was a look in his face which belied the cynical wording. She leaped up from the chair, put her hands on his shoulders and cried again. Bastwick was moved. We have said that there had never been much apparent sympathy between them. Now all this seemed to be changed, he was thinking to himself. Perhaps she was thinking the same thing. Came in an interruption, a discordant jar, and it spelt Derek.

"Hullo, Ethne! Oh, you there, Uncle Geoff! I

didn't see you. I've been trying some private shots on the billiard table that I've hired a cad to coach me in lately, but I'll be hanged if I can bring them off at all. It's disgusting."

"Like your shoot this afternoon, Derek—according to you," rejoined Bastwick drily. "Never mind, it's a world of unevenness. Better luck next time."

Even Derek's rather obtuse and rather complacent understanding could not fail to evolve a meaning here, which perhaps was not in the least intended. But somehow or another, confound it, those were the very words which his uncle had used on the occasion of that almost fatal mishap beneath the old gibbet, some two or three hours before. He wondered if there was any significance in them.

"Look here, Uncle Geoff," he flared forth, "what do you mean? You said that before, you know."

"Did I?" answered the other coolly. "I say so many things, so do we all—incidentally there's the dressing-bell," as the clang of that implement was heard outside. "I think we'd better all go and get into our evening war paint, don't you?"

Derek, in his room, arraying himself in white waistcoat and striped evening trousers and silk socks, etc., etc., felt disgusted, snubbed. Now it was by no means the genial side of his relative that appealed to him, but quite the other. Both had snubbed him, Bastwick with that beastly sneering, satirical, hardly-know-what-he-means kind of way, Ethne with her studied indifference. Starting to read a paper instead of talking to him, by Jove, as if he wasn't there! Yes, he felt snubbed.

The dinner was not a success. Derek had much better have gone home, mist and all, or tried to. Bastwick had much better not have induced him to adopt the opposite course. In short, Derek made himself anything but agreeable. But somehow or other this fact, when he came to look back upon it afterwards, did not seem to affect the other two of the trio in the very least. A few subsequent glasses of port, however, seemed to revive his normal self complacency.

"Look here, Ethne," he broke out. "Why not come with me for that run in the car to-morrow? We could run out to Thurnley by lunch time, and fetch up at Coplestone and dine, and get back here by moonlight. That would give us an odd hundred and fifty miles run or nearer a hundred and eighty. What do you say?"

"Well, I don't know," answered the girl, "I'll sleep on it and tell you in the morning." But Bastwick's face had taken on a curious expression, which certainly Derek did not notice. "*That* run in the car," the latter had said, clearly referring to some prior arrangement—in a word, an arrangement made over his head. Now there was nothing that Bastwick resented so much as this kind of thing. But for the present he said nothing. It was just possible, however, that his manner towards Ethne had chilled off a little as they bade each other good-night.

The smoke-room was a model of snugness equally with the lounge. Good sporting prints enlivened the walls, and the windows looked out on an at present thick mist, but normally on a glorious panorama of

the moor and the meadowland leading up to it. Entering this a little later, Bastwick found his nephew already in possession, and, characteristically, lounging in the most comfortable armchair the room contained, nor did it in the least occur to the latter even to hint at giving it up to his host and elder. Parenthetically there is a great deal in a man's pet armchair, and instinctively any one but a fool knows when he has usurped it. Now this note was an additional jar as regarded Bastwick, to the jar of the greater and preceding one. And the said preceding one had annoyed him more than enough.

He lit a cigar and for some minutes puffed away in silence; semi-silence rather, for he replied to the younger man's remarks in monosyllables.

"Oh, Lord," said the latter to himself. "The old Boss has got his back up about something again. Wonder what it is?" He was soon to know.

"May I ask, Derek," began Bastwick, outwardly bland, "what arrangements you were referring to, when you suggested monopolizing Ethne all day to-morrow?"

"Oh, that's it," thought Derek in answer to his own self-communing. Then aloud—

"Why, I was suggesting yesterday evening to Ethne that we might put in a spiffing good run, and the idea seemed to catch on. Why not?"

"Why not?" repeated Bastwick. "Is Ethne living in your house or in mine, may I ask?"

"Well, I don't see the point," answered the other —but he did.

"Possibly not," rejoined Bastwick, "so I'll proceed to explain it, and incidentally two or three

other points as well. In short, you come over here and ' take charge ' too much. This is only one case in point. You seem to be labouring under the delusion that my arrangements are to be subservient to yours, so I may as well take the opportunity of telling you, once and for all, that they are not."

Derek did not know what to say. He stared at his relative, emitting quick resentful puffs from his cigar. But Bastwick said nothing. He leant back in his—second—chair, sending out his own smoke wreaths in perfectly calm fashion.

" Do I understand then," burst forth Derek quickly, " that you object to Ethne going out with me on this run to-morrow ? "

" You may understand just that very thing," was the imperturbable answer.

" And pray why ? "

" I seldom give reasons, and this case is not one of the exceptions."

" But Ethne is grown up, isn't she ? " retorted Derek, striving to blend a withering tone with his angry one.

" As to that, I can put you on to the address where you can find her birth registration if you are worried by any doubts on the subject."

Derek got up and paced the room, quickly, furiously. The other did not move in his chair and took no notice of him whatever.

" But," burst forth the incensed youth, " I consider it an insult to me—yes, a damn, positive insult —that I'm not fit to be entrusted with a girl for the inside of a day."

" You can consider it—to use part of your own

language—what you damn please. Talking of insults, I consider it a very great insult for any one to come into my house and behave to me as you, for some time past, have made a point of behaving within it."

"Well, I'll get out of it the first thing to-morrow, as soon as it's light enough to see," blared Derek, now thoroughly losing his temper. "What's more I'll never come into it again."

"Take care," warned the other, good-humouredly satirical. "Perhaps you never may. Life has its surprises, you know, and some of us change. By the way, they say we change every seven years, and I believe this is nearly the end of one of my cycles. Got it?"

But the other was too speechless with wrath to reply, and whether he grasped the subtly veiled hint or not the speaker could not determine. Without another word, he flung himself from the room.

But Bastwick lit a fresh cigar, and lay back in his chair thinking—thinking long and deeply. But no fragment of a share in his thought had his incensed young kinsman who had just left him.

"Derek gone?" asked Bastwick, when he and Ethne met in the morning.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "I heard his car about half-past six, but he didn't even leave a message to say good-bye."

"That will be disappointing for you, won't it? You'll be done out of your long day out."

"Not much disappointment," she laughed. "Didn't I tell you that a very little of Derek went

a very long way. A whole day out? No, thanks."

"So he has been as good as his word," remarked Bastwick, and then he told her something of what had passed the night before; omitting, however, the actual incident which had brought matters to a head, in that it regarded her. "To tell you the truth I didn't think he would be as good as his word. He swore he'd never come into the house again. Well, I shan't die of grief if he doesn't go back on that undertaking, but I'm very much afraid he will."

Ethne smiled to herself. She thought so too.

CHAPTER VIII

MAROONED

THE sun rose red and brassy on the soft heave of the oily green sea. The sea was usually blue, but now it had not altogether recovered from the effects of the terrific cyclone. The coast line was broken into rocky bays. Here and there the bold crag surmounting a promontory shot skyward. A couple of hundred yards distant from the shore showed the heads of two jagged reefs above the smooth surface. Looking inland, great masses of luxuriant forest rushed up in waves of foliage to the base of a volcanic-looking cone. Strange birds fluttered and piped, and in the translucent depths of the water beneath, strange fish gleamed and gambolled or chased each other on prey intent, in fulfilment of the universal law of Nature—might is right.

Higher rose the sun in a hot, smoky haze. There was nothing cheering in its glare, rather it suggested destruction, the most terrific element in the world—fire. So seemed it at any rate to the man who stood on that shore gazing out upon the smooth, oily, treacherous sea, his countenance stamped with a kind of hopeless, end-of-all-things expression, and he was

alone. Alone he knew not where; in fact, he told himself he hardly as much as cared.

His brain was in a state of dulled confusion. Even now he hardly realized, could hardly credit, what had happened, and that with sudden lightning-like swiftness which had singled him out for the only one of many to go on living. That time yesterday he was surrounded by ordinary groups, some merry, some not, but all normal; to-day, he was the sole survivor of them all, cast away in the heart of a lonely sea, and for all he could tell destined never to hear the sound of a human voice again.

There had been one in that company of which he was the sole survivor, without whom he now fully realized that life became worthless. In itself the desperate situation in which he found himself would have been depressing enough, but now entirely hopeless.

Something beneath the cliff on which he stood caught his eye. Things had come in from the sea during the night, spars and other fragments of wreckage, casks and boxes and other objects which from there he could not distinguish; and the sight of these things at any rate had a healthy effect, for it suggested occupation. Nothing of what lay there but might be of practical, not to say vital, use, and acting on this idea, he made his way down to the beach.

The man was tall and strong, and he had need to be the latter, for by the time he had hauled even what looked the most necessary of the stranded stuff high and dry, every muscle in his frame seemed to be cracking, for it was single-handed work, hard

work, clumsy work. He sat down on a rock, panting and perspiring. The sun glare seemed to burn into his brain in spears of heat, as he knocked open one of the cases with a stone. For the first time a faint feeling of hunger began to assert itself. He had no means as yet of snaring birds or catching fish. The landing of these things spelt providence to this cast-up waif, cast up with nothing but the clothes which he now stood up in.

It may have been a providential sign of encouragement, but this very first box which he knocked open, proved to be full of tinned provisions, the contents of it alone were calculated to last him quite a long time he saw at a glance. There were others too, and the same would probably hold good of some of these.

"Robinson Crusoe *in excelsis*," he said to himself; "well, at any rate, with that classical and boring mariner's run of luck." He knocked to pieces the case of a tinned tongue and made a meal of sorts, then felt better, slightly better. He tried to brace himself to face his position, his loneliness, the possibility that it might be years or even the remainder of his life which he would be doomed to spend here in awful solitude, for he know that this place was practically outside the world. Still, the very fact of having lit upon the necessaries of life the first thing was a good augury. Surely it meant that the doom which he had been morbidly figuring to himself was not to be his.

The man was not constitutionally of a morbid disposition, far from it. Mentally he was of a cultured, thinking bent, physically every inch a sports-

man. Under ordinary circumstances the present situation would have struck him in the light of an adventure. But have we not said that there was another cause for depression working upon his mind, within his whole being; a deathly, aching sense of loss, to wit. It more than crossed his thoughts that had he been successful, as he so nearly had been, in bringing that other safe to land, what time she had been dashed from his grasp irresistibly by contact with the reef, what time he himself had been thrown up on the shore to lie in a state of unconsciousness for hours, this might have proved a veritable island of Eden. Now it would prove but a dreary inferno.

With this in his mind he started suddenly up and gazed along the shore, with a renewed misery of apprehension in his eyes. If things were washed up, why not—people. No, he could not face that. Death was one thing, mangled disfigurement another, and in the glare of the burning sun he felt a shiver of horror and heartbreak. There was only one antidote to this dreadful frame of mind; he must get to work again.

Rested now, he went to the water's edge and pulled and hauled at the remaining cases; anything that might contain food was the first essential, wherefore he landed these first, hauling them up high and dry beyond all possible reach of the sea. This labour lasted for hours. Deadly exhausted again he sat down, the perspiration streaming from him, his brain dizzy and in a whirl. The remainder would keep until the morrow. The sun showed signs of sinking. He had laboured hard for hours and hours; a trifle harder than he had ever laboured before in his life. And

now he had to face the night, the first night, of his awful solitude.

There were caves in these cliffs and rocks, one of them would give him shelter. There might be malarious dews which would render it inexpedient to court slumber under the stars of heaven. He would select one of such, for he did not at all fancy the idea of lying down within the forest shades until he had made further exploration. Snakes, venomous creeping things, and for all he knew wild animals might find him out there. At any rate, in one of these clean, wind-swept caves, redolent of the breath of the salt sea, the air was clearer, more wholesome, or at any rate seemed so. He would explore and see.

But as he rose to put this plan into execution, an object caught his glance. An object lying just beyond the line of wreckage, the sight of which caused him to postpone his well-earned rest for the present. It was a water-logged boat.

"That's the captain's dinghy, I'll swear," he uttered aloud as he made his way down to the nearest point from which he could obtain a view of it. "Now how to get it ashore through all this tangle. Well, here goes."

He entered the water and half wading, half swimming, soon reached the little craft. It was submerged to the gunwale and not much easier to move than a block of solid granite. However, he was exceptionally strong and in first-rate condition, moreover here his feet could touch bottom. With something of a herculean effort he managed to drag the craft along, nearly letting go, however, as a glistening triangular fin disappeared from the surface,

and a nasty long, gliding shape was visible just beneath and that alarmingly near. This was peril, however, on which he had reckoned and accordingly, with each effort he mightily splashed and shouted. But fortune, they say, favours the brave, and with a thrill of unspeakable relief he worked the boat in, and having partially baled it succeeded in beaching it. To throw out the remainder took time, but time was no object, and the task was accomplished at last. Then he hauled it up on to the beach high and dry.

Standing over this find came the first sorry feeling of exultation which he had yet experienced. At any rate now he had the means of leaving the scene of his captivity. He gazed forth upon the vastness of the ocean waste, then upon this absurd-looking cockle shell—still, such things had been attempted—had been done—and at any rate he had a boat, a tight, sound boat, small as it was. That was something—in fact, a great deal.

The sun was really sinking now, glowing blood-red through a great haze of crimson cloud. The tired, worker gazed at it with hopeless eyes, the round, flaming ball dropped through its red haze, and touched the sea line; as it did so the watcher's strained imagination almost made him hear a hiss and a boil as of molten metal touching the water. It seemed to sink out of sight in a minute. There was no afterglow on the cliffs and forest and scarred volcanic cone. All took on a vivid dusking light, then a gloom which was hardly even twilight. And before he had time to gain the cave whch he had marked out for his night's resting-place the world was dark.

Now the inexpressible loneliness of his position, of his surroundings, was borne irresistibly home to him. Weird, unfamiliar cries of bird and beast sounded from the mysterious gloom of the forest. Great bats wheeled and circled round the caves and crags, their gnome-like proportions just visible against the dusking sky. On the smooth glassy surface of the sea, a hollow splash showed where some great denizen of the deep was disporting itself; something sinister, of course, in keeping with the time and the place and the scene and the hour.

All intensified the sense of overwhelming, utter solitude that was upon him. The first night of it, how many nights of it? How many days, weeks, months, years of it? Before he entered the cave which was to be his night's resting place, he turned once again to look at the calm, treacherous sea. Ghosts of the drowned seemed to rise from it and stare at him. He could even see their faces, faces which he had last seen merry with laughter, or yawning healthily tired, as their owners sought their cabins which in an hour or so were to prove their vaults. But there was one face which he did not see, which he should have seen among these, yet he did not.

This would not do. He must sleep. All his joints, all his muscles, were aching with the sheer hard labour he had undergone. He turned again to enter the cave. It was no great depth, yet now it looked black and forbidding, and suggestive of drear, unwholesome mystery. Tired, worn out as he was, something of this influence came over him, a sort of impulse moving him to pass the night in the open

rather than in the blackness of this natural shelter.

As it happened, he had a close-shutting, water-tight match-box in his pocket. It contained a few precious wax vestas. Should he infringe on this inestimable store and light one. He resisted the impulse. He had already investigated this particular place thoroughly, had been within sight of it ever since during the course of his labours. He didn't care to waste one means of procuring light; and then he had hardly entered than his limbs began to fail under him with sheer physical exhaustion. He subsided to the ground and slept.

Out on the dark liquid plain great things heaved and splashed, their wet shining proportions reflecting the stars. Down on the beach evil things crept, for the things of the sea are also creatures of the night, and the lone human in this world waste of mystery and of fear, this water waste teeming with life, slept; slept and dreamed. Come the morrow—but he did not dream of that, his dreams were of yesterday.

CHAPTER IX

"O SOLITUDE, WHERE ARE THY CHARMS?"

THE sun shot up from the eastern skyline, flooding the world with radiant light. The smoky luridity of the day before had disappeared. There was a look of blue gladness on the lonely sea, a note of cheeriness in the piping of the newly awakened bird voices that somehow did not seem to suggest the idea of uninhabited wilderness; the beautiful blending of blue and green of sea with land, was not at all suggestive of awesome solitude, rather suggestive was it of a day, or at any rate a morning, for alluring exploration.

Kerchival awoke; sitting up with a suddenness that nearly brought his head in collision with the ceiling of his cave. His first and confused idea was that he had started up in his cabin and nearly hit his head against the upper bunk, but the jagged triangle of light, of blue sea, which met his eyes brought back everything. Quickly he rose and went outside.

Here the atmosphere of morning imparted to him, however unconsciously, its own influence. It even imparted to him a certain amount of hopefulness. This was different to the lurid smoky sunrise of yesterday, and the boding sultriness of the day.

A light breeze ruffled the blue of the water, here and there a flying fish like a darting spark of silver fire skimmed the liquid plain, while bird voices from the forest recesses inland lent their quota to the cheeriness of sight and sound.

Kerchival stood gazing at all this for a minute, then he obeyed the impulse which would be that of ninety-nine out of a hundred well set up, healthy Englishmen. He went straight down to the beach and began to throw off his clothes. Yet here, steady! That pinnacle of rock jutting out into the blue water —not green and oily water to-day—was simply built to afford an ideal header, a header wherein there would be no fear of the diver's head coming in contact with the bottom of the sea, but there might be something else to fear in those translucent depths. That long, snaky shape, for instance, sliding beneath the surface yesterday would have warned him as to this, had warning been necessary. No, he must forego the delights of " headers," or deep-sea side strokes and the rest of it, and be content to take his splash in the depth limit of the squealing feminine Brighton tripper clinging spasmodically to a bathing machine clothes-line. That is the worst of the beautiful, warm, Southern waters; the shiver and teeth-chatter of, say the English Channel, is discounted by the preponderance of aggressive and ravenous fish of the larger sorts. He did not hurry his morning " tub " ; he knew he was safe within that shallow depth. When at length he emerged and sat down to dry in the sun, he felt vastly refreshed; somehow things now seemed to take on a more cheerful aspect. Getting into his clothes again, he returned to the box

of tinned provisions and made a very fair breakfast.

"Now for a round of exploration," he said out loud, purposely to hear the sound of his own voice. Incidentally he determined that he would do all his thinking out loud, so could he imagine himself talking to some one else.

"I think I'll do the rest of the pulling in of these things later on; the sea is smooth and likely to remain so, and there doesn't seem to be anything in the way of tide. But, good Lord, I wish there was anything in the way of smoke, however one must do without and make the best of it."

He climbed to the brow of the cliff again, beneath which was his sleeping-cave. From here a ravine, down which trickled a stream of water, seemed to lead up into the very heart of the mysterious forest depths. The trees—all unfamiliar to him—rose to a great height, while here and there between the stems, swung tangled trailers and a sparse undergrowth.

"First of all," he mused, "first of all—this." His eyes had lighted on what seemed to serve his purpose. He was already sawing with his pocket knife at the drooping limb of a tree, but it was a long, hard job. The knife was an ordinary and indifferent one and none too sharp, moreover the wood was hard, cruelly hard, but that was all the better for its purpose. At the end of half an hour of patient working he found himself in possession of what was really a very serviceable and substantial club. This was better. At any rate, he had a weapon of some sort.

"Now then," he went on, "I mustn't lose myself. Well, it isn't the first time I have had to strike my own way through this sort of thing."

The forest shade was green and cool and pleasant. A reaction from the dull hopelessness of the day before had come over Kerchival; even his sense of loss seemed mercifully dulled for the time being. He was up against a keen, hard struggle for existence now, and such a course has a tendency to damp the finer sentiment. He walked on, swinging his club, yet keeping a keen observation for everything in front and on either side of him. Bright-winged birds flitted beneath the trees uttering various quaint or raucous notes, but on one species his attention was specially centred. This was a large green pigeon, speckled with white, and nearly, if not quite, twice the size of the common or British wood pigeon. Here was the prospect of abundant commissariat in itself, yet how to get at them since he had no firearms? Well, he thought he knew. Onward and upward he kept on his way; still no break in the forest. He must have been travelling more than an hour if not two; he could not determine since his watch had stopped owing to its immersion. But he kept steadily on, with the intuition of an experienced traveller feeling his way by the sloping rise of the ground. Once or twice a stealthy rustle in the undergrowth and heavy withal, suggested the passage of either some animal or a snake of the larger species, as to the latter, he felt no apprehension, knowing that such would never attack while the whole way lay before it wherein to make itself scarce. As to the former—well, his grasp tightened

instinctively on his newly fashioned club. Still, he hardly believed that this island, for he had made up his mind that it was an island, could contain anything four-footed that would be of a formidable nature towards man.

At last the forest began to grow sparse, and the acclivity steeper. He had attained to a considerable height, and the sea breeze blew much cooler as the trees ended and he stepped forth into the open.

The open, so far open, that it was a change from the overshadowing trees. Huge rocks in fantastic tumble; and black surfaces between them grown with thin and skimpy layers of grass. He realized that he was nearing the apex of the volcanic cone.

This at any rate was interesting—very. He would climb on till he reached the rim of the crater, which could not be much further, but the way was rough and grew rougher. Kerchival began to feel tired. It was a lassitude which attacked him suddenly, inexplicably, and with it a return of the depression which had been upon him the day before. He sat down. Two great birds of prey sprang out from the rock turret immediately above him and soared, circling overhead, uttering a shrill and raucous scream. This echoed and reverberated among the rocks and hard lava in most doleful and depressing fashion. The feeling of dead weariness deepened upon him; it was almost as if he were under some influence, some spell, as though the superstitious terror with which he had heard that the natives of these parts invested such places really was based upon something. Viewed from below, the point to which he had attained had looked smooth and easy of

going, but now he found himself amid a tumble of rocks and boulders, a very labyrinth into which, did he penetrate much further just now, he stood a good chance of losing himself even more so than among the trackless shades of the forest beneath. Moreover a mighty thirst had assailed him. There would be no water flowing from this arid chaos of rock and hard lava. He had better return to the nearest point of the cool runnel whose course he had to a great extent threaded in the ravine below.

The forest shades seemed different now, as having quenched his thirst he struck into them again. The buoyant encouragement of the morning had dropped, and all the former weariness and depression had set in with renewed force. He had no precise idea of the time, but it seemed many hours since he had started on his tour of exploration. The shades had grown darker—could it be that the sun was already dropping? At that rate it would be as well to regain the site of his temporary resting-place.

Now a sudden instinct came upon him that he was not alone. It might have been the hurried, and, it seemed to him, alarmed, dashing of birds away from his path; and they not alarmed by himself, he could tell that from their behaviour on his outward progress. Anyway there was a something or somebody that was watching him; of that he felt at that moment absolutely confident, and the idea was not pleasant. There might be strange wild denizens of this place. A flight of poisoned arrows perhaps, even from the tree tops, might at any moment provide him with a last surprise, and he, but for a stick, was unarmed and therefore powerless.

And with every step the conviction that he was being watched, followed, grew deeper and deeper.

But no manifestation took place, and at length the forest ended, and there lay the open seaboard, its very openness seeming to appeal to him now through sheer force of contrast. And yet, and yet. All his depression was upon him again to the full. Here was the second night staring him in the face—the second night of perhaps hundreds, thousands of nights—alone. Well, here came in the same remedy, hard work.

Tired as he was he set to and secured the remainder of the cases and bales, carrying the one already broached to the shelter of the cave where he had slept. Rains might supervene, and he could not afford to chance the waste of anything. The sun would soon touch the rim of the sea. It would be dark immediately, and then—the introspective solitude of the still, dead, silent night.

At last he broke off, forced to do so by sheer utter physical weariness, and now the mental weariness would begin. He looked out over the purpling sea. White gulls circled and swooped, screaming and chattering as they quarrelled over their just seized prey. A swirl on the surface, a cackle and a flap of wings, where one of them had been converted into prey in its turn. Far out to sea the castaway thought to detect some object, and his heart leaped within him as the idea struck him that it might be one of the ship's boats, which having drifted at haphazard was now fetching up again at the scene of the disaster. Making a binocular of his hands, he gazed, but the black speck grew no nearer, then died away

in distance in the first shades of gathering dusk.

He turned away sick at heart, sick with the dashing of great hopes. That boat might have contained the very presence whose recollection had been eating into his being with a dull aching sense of loss, or at any rate it would have brought some human companionship to him in this solitude. But that was not to be.

Again the sun's rim touched the far sea-line, in splendour of plashing fire, again almost instantaneously the duskless night had drawn down. Kerchival dragged himself wearily along the pebbly beach strewn with shells and coral, to climb up to his cave when—every nerve within him thrilled and it seemed that the drums of his ears were beating hard. For as sure as he was alive he heard the sound of human footsteps, yes, human footsteps, crunching the shingle. Stay, it was the echo of his own. He stood for a moment, still rigid, listening with all his might. No, there was no mistake about it; it was no echo, for standing perfectly still himself, he heard the sound approach nearer, moreover coming straight for where he was standing.

Was it real? he said to himself, or was it the mere working of a strained imagination? He stared into the fast-gathering dusk with dilated eyes, and then—and then—— From round the pile of wreckage and cases which he had collected, there appeared a form, a human form, a female form.

Kerchival struck both hands hard against his temples.

No, this could not be, it was an illusion—a satanic illusion born of weariness and strain. But a cry,

proceeding from this new apparition, broke the spell. He staggered as though drunk, along the shingle, and then—the two were face to face. One word, one ejaculation, escaped from the pair simultaneously—

"You!"

CHAPTER X

THE BRIGHTENING

EVEN then Kerchival could hardly believe his ears, he was dreaming of course. He would wake up in a minute—in his cave. But the other voice again broke the spell.

"Oh, I am so dreadfully worn out, I thought to fling myself into the sea and end it all. I've been wandering about ever since I woke up, here on this shore, starving too."

That brought Kerchival to earth again, and a deep exclamation of pity and concern, and certainly not undashed with some other sentiment, escaped him.

"Come," he said, "I can find you food, at any rate."

Placing an arm under hers, so as to help her over the heavy shingle, he guided her towards his cave, helping her to climb the gully which led to it, a help indeed which she sorely needed. Once there no time was lost in further investigating the case of tinned provisions.

"Take care. Go easy," he warned, a flutter of concern in his voice. "After a big starve like that you mustn't overdo it at first. Great heavens,

and ever since yesterday morning, or rather the night before last! Forty-eight hours! It's unthinkable!"

She did not reply. The physical cravings were all in all at that moment. And he? Here was this very presence which he had told himself would make this ocean prison a veritable island of Eden; here suddenly, miraculously, thrown as it were at his feet. But her next words went somewhat towards showing that it might be an Eden not perhaps devoid of the serpentine element.

"Those horrible wretches," were her first words. "Are there any more of them here?" and a look of alarm sprang into her eyes.

"What? Who?" he queried wonderingly. "There's no one here but me. Till I saw you I thought I was alone here; it might be for life."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"You haven't seen them then?" she asked.

"I've certainly not seen a living soul since I lost you when we were so nearly safe, but who or what is it that you are referring to?"

"Why, three of those foreign horrors that we used to notice on the ship and wonder how a decent British deck could be defiled with such scum. They managed to get ashore too, somehow. Well, I had very good reason for thinking that they and I had better part company, very good reason, mind," she repeated with emphasis, "as to which it is a good thing for me that I am not one of those drawing-room-reared weaklings. These brutes have been trying to find me again, but I threw them off the track and came back here to see if I could find food

of sorts, or some kind of weapon. They can't have been far behind me when we met."

"Good heavens!" said the other seriously. "But I don't suppose they had got any weapons—firearms, I mean. In fact, I don't see how they could have."

"No, only knives; sailors' sheath knives."

"Well, that's better," said Kerchival. All the same, it was not reassuring. A trio of Peruvian or Argentine or Bolivian cutthroats armed with sheath knives, and he armed with nothing but a club and an ordinary, and for defensive purposes perfectly useless, pocket knife! But he knew a way in which he could more than equalize matters, given another day. Still, the more he thought of it the less he liked it. The same number of British seamen would have been an acquisition, but three "Dagoes," drawn from the scum of a pretty low down race representative of even Latin humanity, and with every motive for getting rid of this isolated woman's only protector, and he practically unarmed, were capable of proving a very formidable source of danger. But further questioning of his companion was useless for the present. Even before she had finished eating she had lain back and fallen fast asleep, the sleep of hard, physical exertion.

Kerchival bent over her. He placed his coat under her head, which was the only poor way of making her comfortable at his disposal. Then he went to the mouth of the cave and looked forth. There was no sign of life, of human life that is. The night was as still as its predecessor had been. Yet he determined to mount guard. Their entry into

this place might have been seen. There was no feeling of weariness, of depression about him now. He could not have slept had he tried, and he certainly didn't mean to try.

Now he thought to see a solution of that strange instinct which had come over him, up there in the forest, the feeling of being followed. These three undesirables had probably sighted him by accident, and had been watching him, undetermined as yet as to their plan of action.

As he sat there on guard, the soft breathing of the sleeper and the gentle lap, lap of the waves beneath were the only sounds to fall upon his ears. What a brightening had come upon the former outlook of gloom and despair, he thought. Now, indeed, he had come to life again. The whole horizon seemed to be glowing as with the newly risen sun. But she—how would she take it? Would she become impatient, fretful, discontented? He thought not, somehow. His mind went back to the many talks, to the many ideas, exchanged between them, when pacing the decks alone at night after every one else had turned in, or seated, their chairs close together in some cool corner beneath the awning, during the heat of the day. He had gauged her character then and felt sure of it, now had come the test. Yet their first meeting here had been almost commonplace, prosaic. Why? Because under certain circumstances the physical will dominate the mental, and here the physical was represented by a starving woman badly in need of food. So much for romance, and yet that not necessarily.

Well, to-morrow would show a different rendering.

She would wake up, thoroughly refreshed; her strong physique and natural cheerfulness would do the rest. He began to allow himself the brightest of anticipations.

Hour after hour went by. There was no moon, but the abundance of stars, of gushing constellations, hanging like clustering lamps from the zenith, afforded a light so brilliant as almost to throw a shadow, and—what was this? There *was* a shadow.

Kerchival did not start, unless mentally, but he was thoroughly roused from his meditations. Reality as represented by material force and cunning, above all cunning, had pushed its way in upon these. The shadow was moving stealthily along the open space on the brow of the steep which led to the cleft or cave, and the shadow was that of a recumbent figure, a crawling figure, a human figure. The watcher, be it remembered, was in shadow himself, and therefore imperceptible to anything within or without. The advancing shadow now materialized into definite shape and that shape but a few yards away. Kerchival, though a man of thought, was also a man of action, eke a man of decision. He sprang like a tiger upon that materialized shadow. There was the thud of an impact, the shortest of hoarse exclamations, the sound of a solid and fairly heavy body, together with the clatter of falling stones, thudding down to the beach below. There was another sound; the chinkle of metal on the stones and that beneath his feet.

"Number one," he said to himself with grim complacency, picking up a knife—an *unsheathed* sailor's

knife. "One foeman the less and one weapon the more. Supposing we'd both been asleep?"

He took a keen look around, then returned to his former place in the shadow and waited, for all the world like a crouching spider. This was getting exciting. He was hoping that another would present himself as a candidate for similar treatment. He felt no scruple whatever in such a matter. This was clearly a case of stern necessity, of the weakest to the wall. A particularly villainous type of Dago creeping in upon their resting-place with an *unsheathed knife* in hand, had simply met with his deserts, to their own present and ultimate preservation. No scruple whatever crossed his mind. He had simply acted with a decision which was wholly salubrious. The while, the soft, regular breathing of the sleeper in the cave had continued uninterruptedly.

All at once Kerchival began to feel irresistibly, overwhelmingly drowsy. The hard toil, the excitement, were more than beginning to tell. Through sheer physical weakness he must succumb, and that might mean death. Death for him at any rate; and she who was dependent on him left to the sweet will of two unhung scoundrels, for, you see, that unsheathed knife told its own tale. It left no doubt whatever as to the intentions of its former possessor. He was but an advance of the other two, and nothing but the quick suddenness with which his obviously murderous errand had been defeated had saved the situation. The other two were lurking hard at hand to see how things would go. Now that they had seen, Kerchival, felt fairly sure he would not

be troubled with them any more that night. But that they were lurking close at hand he had no sort of doubt, wherefore on no account must he allow himself to go to sleep, not even to doze. And yet, the effort to refrain from doing so, was becoming one of almost physical painfulness.

What had happened to the first of the three thus disposed of he cared nothing, if anything he entertained a grim regret that the other two had not given him the opportunity of sending them to travel the same road. He had been quick in reverting to the primitive state, this man who had suddenly been thrown into primitive conditions—the defender of the female against hostile male ; and such conditions he was perfectly willing and ready to take up. He had knocked about the world more than enough not to know that such humans as these, under given circumstances, were not human at all, simply beasts. Here were the circumstances, and thanks be to the gods here was he.

Yet there was something about the stillness of the situation that aroused his suspicions. Listening " with gaping ear " as the French idiom has it, he could hear no sound of movement. That looked bad. The other two had not gone down to investigate as to what had happened to their comrade ; had they done so the clink of stones, in the stillness of the night, would certainly have betrayed such movement. But no such sound came to his ears. Clearly they were waiting with the deadly patience of the savage, and also with the knowledge common to all savages, for the most slumbrous time of the night, the hour before dawn, to wit.

And now the strain became more and more unbearable. A fearful drowsiness had come over Kerchival, one against which he was finding it momentarily more and more impossible to strive. He pinched himself, he twisted himself, he smacked his own head even, in his desperate efforts to keep awake. But it was physically impossible. He could not go out and walk up and down; a couple of well aimed and heavy stones hurled by unseen hands would have about the same effect as the same duality of bullets. It was of no use. His head dropped, and thenceforward he might have been a helpless log.

Two creeping figures crept stealthily onward, worming their way like snakes, the starlight showing up two swarthy cruel faces, with be-ringed ears. Kerchival was emitting a series of secure and blissful snores, which guided the enemy wholesomely. The first was within a yard of him, knife upraised and only waiting to make sure in the darkness of the spot wherein to drive it home when——

What seemed a whirlwind, a tornado, a railway collision, suddenly struck the holder of that knife. It flew from his grasp, while he staggered back to the edge of the cliff, only saving himself by a miracle from going over the same. While in the starlight beyond the prostrate body of her guard, stood the tall fine figure of the erewhile exhausted, half-starved, sleep-weighed-down woman, the club which her protector had fashioned gripped fiercely in her hand, and the light of battle shining in the eyes which glanced quickly from side to side as in search of another antagonist.

Even then Kerchival did not wake. But she, standing there, primitive weapon in hand, primitive woman once more, kept watch till dawn.

CHAPTER XI

MORE HOSTILITIES

"WHY—what on earth?" cried Kerchival, starting up. "You up first, and what are you doing with that thing?" his glance falling on the club which she still held.

"Oh, it's as well that I was," she said, and then she put him in possession of the facts already recorded. He listened in wonder and admiration, and not at all a sense of complacency. He had slept at his post, and this had been the result. Then he told her, perhaps with an unworthy desire of making things even, what had happened during the earlier part of his vigil, and how the odds were even now. It was her turn to feel astonished, and with her astonishment mingled relief. Primitive woman again—a so-called fellow-creature meeting his death, but the instinct of self-preservation came uppermost.

The sun rising in golden glory from the rim of the sea struck full upon this pair—and a finely matched pair they were. Kerchival, tall and broad and powerful of frame, could not exactly be called a handsome man, but there was that about his strong face and twinkling humorous brown eyes which appealed to women far more than a classical profile would have done. There was that about him which appealed to

his own sex too, for he was one of those men who come under the definition of very much liked. The woman, also tall for her sex, broad of shoulder, Junoesque of outline, grey eyes set in sun-tanned oval face, dark brown hair rolled in great masses, looked likely to prove a fitting mate for the primitive conditions face to face with which the two had already begun to find themselves.

Now as they stood looking at each other, in the full glow of the opening day, their eyes met and laughed.

"We have begun doing the savage already, it seems," remarked Kerchival. "We have each 'downed' our man, only mine has gone rather farther down than yours has. I wonder if the brute's dead, by the way?"

"Let's hope so," she answeed shortly. "Those aren't humans; they are dangerous animals or worse. Heavens, when I think of what I went through all day yesterday, literally hunted by those beasts, why I can only wish they all were."

"I'm not surprised," rejoined Kerchival. "I'm bound to admit I rather wish it myself, I'm afraid they will put us to no end of trouble, not to say risk. If they had been so many decent Britishers, why of course we would have helped each other together, and so on. As it is we shall have to be continually on the watch, and although of course in the day-time it's nothing, still we must go to sleep some time, and then they'll try it on like they've just done. If only I'd got a six-shooter, with only half a dozen rounds even, I wouldn't mind so much. Their beastly knives are what gives them the advantage."

"But couldn't we manage to get possession of those somehow?" she said. "They've got to sleep too, remember."

"Yes, on the same terms that we have, one asleep, one on watch. I don't know if one could induce the brutes to make common cause with us; they want food as well as we do, but we shall have to watch them like a cat does for a mouse. We'll have a try anyhow directly. Curious, isn't it?" he went on. "Here we are without one of the appliances of civilization, and a few hours ago we—you at any rate—could hardly have thought it possible to do without them. For instance, for bathroom you'll have to go down behind that projecting shoulder of rock. I'll keep sentry go, and I don't think our oily skinned friends will come within distance of heaving in sight; only for Heaven's sake don't go further in than knee deep. These waters just grow sharks, to say nothing of other beasts of vast size and evil propensities."

"Oh, I'll take care. Show me the place. I'm just yearning for a souse."

In about a quarter of an hour she returned to him; fresh, radiant, as totally different to the worn-out being of last night as could well be. Then he took his turn while she kept watch.

"Goodness me," she laughed when they came together again, "what am I to do without even a comb?"

"Why, we'll make one all in good time, possibly even a brush. But what am I going to do without a razor? I'm no beauty at the best of times, but when I've got about a week of stubble on hand

you'll be stipulating that I keep to my own side of the island, except on Sundays."

Thus characteristically they laughed and joked, these two English of the better sort, companions in adversity, thoroughly determined to make the best of things. There was no prospect of starvation, the storage that had come ashore would last them for quite a while, and long before these were exhausted Kerchival would have found means to circumvent such wild and edible life as the island contained. No, assuredly there was no reason to look on the gloomy side of things.

"Now," he began, "we must get to work and investigate our resources; that ought to appeal to you, if only that 'rummaging' is not an unpopular feminine pastime. I'll do the pulling and hauling, you do the rummaging."

Here again came in a characteristic of changed conditions. Kerchival was not going to waste time in investigatng the ultimate fate of the murderous rascal he had pushed over the cliff the night before; normally he was kind-hearted to a degree, but he was also logical. There remained two other murderous rascals, whose province it was to make the said investigation, or leave it alone.

Throughout the best part of that day, he and his companion worked. Thanks to our up-to-date method of tinning provisions, they found a further supply of these, and utterly unspoiled by contact with sea water. Other cases too, more or less battered, contained stuff which very easily might be manufactured into clothing of sorts. So far good, but of weapons or implements found they none,

and the importance of this Kerchival, at any rate, fully realized. The boat too, which he had landed, was a source of anxiety. What if the two miscreants now in hiding were to steal it: now in hiding because throughout the long day they had shown no sign of their presence.

"It's utterly impossible to get all this up to our headquarters to-night," said Kerchival, "and if we don't those scoundrels will be sure to come down and lift a lot of it, then they'll take to the forest and be a constant source of menace to us. Upon my word, I don't know what course to take; even if we did establish pacific relations you couldn't rely on treacherous rascals like those. The first thing to do would be to try and get their knives away from them—in short, to disarm them. Those of that breed feel very helpless when separated from their sharp, but very inferior steel. By the way, I might grind that one we have already got, so as to be able to shave with it."

She burst out laughing. The idea seemed to come so whimsically upon the utterly serious side they had been discussing. They might have been sitting in their deck chairs on board. It was such whimsicalities which had at first attracted her to him. She had found him amusing, cheerful, whereas the residue of her fellow-passengers had been just the reverse.

"But joking apart, we must think out some plan," he went on. "As long as these cutthroats are at large and armed with their own natural weapon, we shall never be able to move, and as for venturing into the forest, why, it would be simply

asking for a jab in the back from one of the brutes lurking behind a tree——What's the matter ? "

For the other had started and was looking beyond him.

" Here they come," she murmured.

Kerchival wheeled round. The two of whom they had been talking were advancing towards them. He picked up his club and loosened the captured knife in its roughly improvised sheath. At this hostile movement the two slackened their pace.

" Halt," he cried, throwing a perfect volume of menace into his tone. This the two understood if not the word. They halted.

" Now, then, throw down your knives," he went on. " Look. So," throwing down his, and picking it up again quickly enough. But this time they did not comply. They talked volubly, but in what dialect their hearers were ignorant. It did not sound even like Spanish. But they managed to convey a very effective signal that they wanted food. Kerchival nodded.

" Drop your knives," he repeated. " Hey ! *Cuchillo in terra,*" as a sudden dim recollection of the Spanish for knife came into his mind.

But if they understood they scowlingly omitted to obey. Kerchival was in a quandary. Had he been possessed of any sort of firearm he could have dictated any terms he chose, but now they were two to one ; moreover tall and strong as he was, it is by no means certain that he would not find it all he could take care of if pitted against even one of these wiry, muscular semi-barbarians.

" They look a sweet pair to be marooned with as

comrades in adversity, don't they ? " he commented, while puzzling over what to do next. And, in fact, nobody would so have chosen them. One, a powerful-looking fellow, had a face that was positively gnome-like in its hideous and obvious capacity for any villainy; the other had the appearance of a negroid Indian.

" Why not let them have some? If they are starving they'll become desperate and all the more dangerous."

" There's something in that," he answered. Then having vainly tried to convey the idea that he was willing to exchange half the contents of a case for even one of their knives, he piled up some tins and packages, and signalled that one of them might come and take it. He did not feel particularly easy when both came, but then it would never do to seem afraid of them. But he stood very thoroughly on his guard against any sudden or hostile move, never once turning his glance away until, having taken the things, they retired in the direction of the forest, cursing to themselves in heartfelt fashion.

Suddenly Kerchival's glance fell upon the dinghy.

" I have an idea," he said. " I'm going to fill up the boat half full of stones, then if these devils want to steal it, they'll kick up such a row throwing out the stones that I'll be able to come and see after them. Talking of stones," he went on, as another idea struck him. " Can you throw stones ? "

She stared, then laughed.

" I haven't tried for a long time, and then people used always to say they would rather be in front of me than behind me."

"H'm! A stone is by no means a contemptible weapon; if sent straight and hard enough it is nearly as effective as a bullet. I happen to be rather a dab at it. Now come and I'll give you some lessons in the gentle art of stone throwing, nothing in the shape of any weapon is to be sneezed at. We'll have half an hour's practice."

"Well, you are a man of resource," she said with a note of admiration in her tone.

"All right, let's begin. See that jutting out bit of rock there? Now let's try how often we can hit that. At any rate, there's no fear of running short of this ammunition."

The target, which was about the height and breadth of a man, was some thirty-five yards distant. Kerchival picked up several beach pebbles, about the size of a hen's egg, and hurled them in quick succession. Rap-rap! Only two of these primitive missiles had missed the mark, and that but narrowly.

"Well done," she cried. "But I should never be able to do that."

"Oh yes, you will, it's only a matter of practice, and we shall have plenty of time before us yet to give to that."

But even as she had predicted her attempts were fraught with woeful result.

"Never mind. You'll improve. It's only a matter of learning to hold your wrist supple instead of stiff; in fact, you're improving already."

So for upwards of half an hour, these two continued what looked like their absurd pastime, and then, unnoticed, the dusk suddenly fell.

"We'll take up some of these to the cave to-night,"

he announced, filling his pockets with some likely-looking pebbles, "they may come in useful. Now we'll get there and make ourselves snug."

But it was not until they were there, that it occurred to Kerchival that he had wholly forgotten to half fill the boat with stones. They had hardly finished their repast, "plain but wholesome," as the school prospectuses say, when a cry arose from the weaker of the pair. She leaped to her feet.

"Why, what is it?" he asked hurriedly.

"Something crawled over my hand, something horrible. Ugh!" and she shivered.

Kerchival's stock of matches was, as we have said, infinitesimal, yet he felt justified in expending one of them now, and well that he did so. What looked like a mammoth centipede was drawing its glistening length along the ground, a huge and shiny beast with innumerable claws. Kerchival had just time by the expiring light of the wax vesta to crush this loathsome monster, but his companion had sprung outside.

"Oh, I can't stay in there in the dark with things like that crawling about all night. I have a peculiar horror of things that creep, things with legs, far more than I have of snakes."

He tried to persuade her, but her fear of human enemies seemed to have sunk in comparison with this new terror. He pointed out to her that such exaggerated specimens of entomology were not common and it might be months before they lit upon another. No, she would not be persuaded; she would lie down outside—and then something happened.

A huge stone came hurtling down from above, narrowly missing them both. With a sudden movement, Kerchival seized his companion and whirled her by main force into shelter again, just as another and larger rock crashed down upon the very spot where they had been standing a moment before.

"A choice of two evils, isn't it?" he said, "and I think inside is the right side after all. Now you go to sleep and I'll keep watch. They won't venture within reach this time, that's certain."

But she declared that she would rather keep watch; she would be totally unable to sleep in any case, and in fact it was little enough sleep either of them were destined to enjoy that night. But nothing further occurred to disturb them.

In the morning Kerchival looked out. His companion, who had fallen asleep at last, was breathing peacefully. Well, he wouldn't rouse her. And then, suddenly something availed to rouse him. He looked hard, then looked away, then looked hard again. This was incredible. Where the boat had lain the night before, now there was no boat. So far as it was concerned the beach was empty. An exclamation escaped him, one of dismay, then of anger at his own remissness.

"What's wrong?" came the voice of his companion within.

"Oh, you're awake then? Well, there *is* something fairly wrong. The boat's gone; stolen, of course."

"But what will they do without oars?" she asked, pertinently enough.

"Exactly, if they weren't watching me when I

hid them. What a fool I was not to bring them up here. Well, it was a pretty scratch pair I managed to knock up, and I don't think they'll exactly do Oxford and Cambridge pace with them. However, let's go down and investigate; it'll be safe now.'t

They did so. There was no sign of the boat, and the cranny wherein Kerchival had hastily stowed away the rough pair of paddles which he had fashioned was empty.

"Gone, wholly gone," he quoted whimsically. "I think we're well rid of them at the price. Now I see why those rocks were dropped on us last night, if we weren't killed, we should get a scare that would keep us effectually indoors, and they've succeeded."

"But what'll they do for water?" asked the other, again pertinently.

"I've solved that question already," he answered. "Don't you see—they have taken away that old breaker I meant to have caulked up, and it won't last them long. Well, we are well rid of them."

"I wonder if that first man was really killed?" she asked with anxiety. "We never seem to have found time to go and investigate."

"We may as well go and do it now," he answered, "or I will go rather, for it's not a nice sight. You wait here for me."

She obeyed, even then keeping a careful look-out. Who knew but their enemies might have landed somewhere else and stealthily returned.

"It's all right," said Kerchival, rejoining her almost immediately. "He's 'done down' right enough; picked dry by crabs or some such vermin.

To-day we'll go up into the forest and kill time making bows and arrows, and you shall learn the noble art of archery. I used to be a dab at it too, at one time, so we'll have some fresh food for a change."

CHAPTER XII

PLOTS OF THE STUPID

THERE are many very silly women in the world, and Derek Hilton's mother was one of them. Consequently it is not surprising that the first thing she should have done on the return of her resentful and sulky hopeful was to fly into a vehement rage; not with him, of course, but with the one who had offended his dignity, her brother to wit. When Mrs. Hilton flew into a rage, which she not infrequently did, her methods were twofold, one was to violently rate the object of it, if at hand, or if absent, to sit down and expend much stationery and verbiage, closely written and thickly crossed, for the benefit or reformation of the offender. She called this giving any one a piece of her mind. It is hardly necessary to say, therefore, that a day or two later Bastwick found himself in possession of just such a one of his sister's mental fragments. His reception of it was characteristic. He opened the envelope, barely glanced down the numerous sheets, then dropped the lot comfortably into the fire. Poor Mrs. Hilton.

"I never read disagreeable correspondence unless I'm obliged to," he remarked to Ethne, who was wit-

nessing this performance with ill-repressed merriment. "And this I'm not."

Mrs. Hilton's next stage of excitement was pleasurable anticipation of her brother's reply, for she dearly loved a "nag," but she ought to have known that relative better. So as time went on and no reply came, she thought it good policy to follow up with a second dose, in the hope of eliciting one. This time she was successful, but her satisfaction was doomed to be very considerably dashed—in fact, there was no room for satisfaction at all. The letter was quite short, not at all to the point and seemed to convey an alarming element. It was wholly whimsical and not in the least resentful, barely mentioning the receipt of her two previous missives. But there were veiled hints as to life being full of surprises, and that he, the writer, had never felt so fit in his life. In fact, he thought he must have gone back the traditional seven years instead of forward. He hoped she would come over and see him before long, as he was not in the least likely to be travelling her way. Ethne sent her love, and so did he as far as such a superlative could emanate from him, and with one or two like whimsicalities, the letter ended. But there was no mention of Derek.

It is not certain whether Bastwick did so with intention, but it is certain that he could have adopted no surer means of reducing his sister to a state of flurry bordering on imbecility, than when inditing this tissue of vague hints.

Great heavens, there could be only one meaning underlying it all, she decided, and then where would be Derek's prospects? It was true he would always

have an independence, a very fair independence as such things go, but if that other ground was cut from under his feet——Oh, it was unthinkable.

"What's the row, Mum?" as the door opened in something like a whirlwind and the object of her hopes and fears entered. "Hullo, had some rotten post? You're looking a bit as if you had," with a glance towards the letter she held.

"Well, I have," she answered. "I've heard from your Uncle Geoffrey at last."

"Then it's sure to be," declared Derek, a frown coming over his face. "He gets more and more nasty and cantankerous every day. Well, what does he say? Does he expect me to write and apologise, because if so I shan't. I don't know any one to beat him in the art of saying the nastiest things in the fewest words and the pleasantest tone."

"Yes, he can do that, but by the way, Derek, do he and Ethne still get on?"

"Get on? Why?"

"Well, you know, she's grown up now, and your uncle is none too sweet-tempered at the best of times."

Derek laughed rather bitterly.

"Get on?" he repeated. "I should jolly well think they did get on. Why, she jumps down my throat if I say even the least little word about him only in chaff. The way she rated me over a certain silly accident was a knock out. She simply nagged, but for all that she can't call her soul her own. Why even that affair that the old Boss and I had the split over shows that."

Poor Derek! how little he would have guessed at

Ethne's dictum on that subject when it had been mooted to her.

"But what's he say," he went on, "if it's not strictly between you two?"

"Oh, it's not. If it weren't that I'm as certain there is something underlying it as that I sit here, I should say that he has written the greatest rubbish I've ever read in my life. Here, look for yourself," handing it to him.

Derek glanced along the whimsical wording, then gave a start and a whistle. The remark about life and its surprises, the reference to the seven years, had an unpleasantly familiar smack, for they brought back that last sulky episode in the smoke-room at Wood Bastwick. Some such words had been uttered then. Now in common with his mother, he read a meaning into them.

"Well, what do you think?" said the latter.

"I believe we think the same thing," he answered. "But for one thing it may have been only his way of being funny."

"Well, I don't like it all the same," she went on.

"But he never sees any one," urged Derek. "No one ever goes near the place, except the rectory girls, and they don't count."

"No one ever *goes* near the place," repeated his mother. "But what if there's somebody *in* the place?"

"Oh, great Scott! What? Ethne?"

She laughed nastily.

"Such things have been, my dear child, and what has been will be again."

"But," stuttered the youth eagerly, "that

would be ridiculous, worse. Why, he's old enough to be her father."

"Even if he were that wouldn't matter," she answered, "considering that that sort of thing is done every day. Only he isn't, not by a long way."

"Great Scott!" was all that Derek could find to reply. "Well, that is a facer, a regular downright nasty one."

If his uncle's parting, and enigmatic words, had carried any weight with him, such at the time was abstract. It had remained for his mother's imagination to reduce it to very simple concrete. Now a hundred little incidents came back to his mind, incidents which he had hardly so much as noticed. For one thing Ethne's attitude, as he had just defined it to his mother; why even the occurrence at The Gibbet now took on portentous proportions. He recalled countless instances of little acts of attention and consideration on the part of the girl towards her relative, cases too wherein he himself had been gently but firmly forced into a back seat. But what really did make him feel entirely disgusted with himself and her, was the recollection of that early morning walk to Semon's Slabs and what had been said there. Thinking over this, the normally infallible Derek decided that he had been made a very complete fool of.

"Well, what are you thinking out all this time?" asked his mother.

He told her, omitting, however, what had occurred at Semon's Slabs.

She shook her head.

"It's a thousand pities you quarrelled with him, Derek," she said. "Now you've broken with him, and by never being there, you're losing important opportunities of spoiling the game."

"Well, how could I have done that?" he asked gloomily.

His mother laughed, and the laugh was not a pleasant one.

"Why, you could have started a fast and furious flirtation with the girl yourself, and that would have disgusted him to every purpose. Perhaps it isn't too late now?"

"Oh, come now, I say, Mum, isn't that just a trifle outside the limit?" and his face flushed hotly as the recollection of Semon's Slabs once more returned. "Besides in any case I said I would not set foot in the house again, and I won't, unless he apologizes."

"My dear Derek, don't be ridiculous. You might as well expect to be presented with the Kohinoor diamond as expect to be apologized to by your Uncle Geoffrey, even if you deserved to be, which between ourselves and upon your own showing, I'm not sure you do. No, I think you ought to adopt the apologetic attitude; put it that you're young and have got a fair slice of the Bastwick temper, and lost what you had of it for the time being the other night—let bygones be bygones, and all that sort of thing."

Derek frowned, but did not at once dismiss the idea.

"And a precious fool I should look, shouldn't I, going begging like that? Besides if things are as you think, you may depend upon it that having

once got me out, he'll keep me out. No, no, I should only be making a fool of myself for nothing. It's disgusting, but it can't be helped."

It will be seen that Ethne's estimate of the genuineness of this youth's professed affection for her fascinating self, was a tolerably accurate one. If he had not actually forgotten what he had said to her that morning at Semon's Slabs it was only to think to himself what a fool he was to have said it. There was something very fetching about her, but then she hadn't a penny and never would have, certainly not if she went against Bastwick's wishes. He might do much better than that. What an escape he had had. His mother looked at him sharply as if by some telepathic process she had been divining his thoughts.

"Derek, was there ever anything between you and Ethne?" she asked.

The youth looked cornered, slightly foolish.

"Well, I suppose we carried on some sort of mild flirtation, got rather thick, don't you know? But upon my soul, at the time I had no idea I was coming within measurable distance even of putting any one else's nose out of joint. But now—well, I'm blowed!"

"I'll tell you what it is, Derek," said his mother, "I've got another idea. I've been thinking it over, and I think I shall give your uncle the benefit of it. Ethne, you know, is a very distant relation indeed, so distant in fact, that really she is hardly a relation at all. Now she's grown up, fully grown up, and I shall point out to your uncle that he ought to make some different arrangement for her."

Derek stared, then, falling back in his chair, went off into an immoderate roar of laughter.

"You are going to write him that?" he gasped when he had partially recovered.

"Most certainly I am. It's my duty and I don't see, Derek, what there is in it to cause such unseemly laughter on your part," she answered huffily.

The youth gulped again.

"Oh Lord! oh Lord! Look here, Mum, I'm going to extort a promise, a solemn promise from you, and that is you'll show me Uncle Geoff's reply. That will be a something to look forward to. Oh Lord, oh Lord!" and he went off again.

"I think you are treating this stupidly, Derek," went on his mother, now seriously. "If your uncle marries, then good-bye to Wood Bastwick for you, and we always thought that he was a confirmed old bachelor."

"I know we did," said Derek ruefully, "and that's where we made the mistake, I'm afraid, up to date. No man's a confirmed old bachelor at fifty, no—I think you said he was less, didn't you?"

"Of course he's less, a great deal less, and that's where I told you just now that there was no such wonderful discrepancy in age. Now you take my advice and make this thing up, you only had a few words after all. You go back as usual, then you're on the spot, and at any rate you can see for yourself how the cat jumps."

"Oh, that be blowed," answered Derek crossly. "I'm not going to slink in there to do any spying business, it doesn't appeal to me."

We have said that Mrs. Hilton was a silly woman;

so she was, on the whole, but, like many silly people she was capable of one point of concentration, and upon this she had now fixed. In fact, it made up quite a pleasant little plot, but there was real downright seriousness beneath it. If Derek would only climb down from his scruples and do his part, why he might bring it off. She knew her brother well enough to know that if once he got disgusted with, disillusioned with, this new idea, he would certainly not repeat the experiment in anybody else's direction, whereby it would be seen that this stupid woman was not always stupid.

But Derek seemed contrarious, he had that inconvenient and male sense of honour, she noted with irritation. She had not sufficient brains nor strength of will to carry out a plot without co-operation, especially against so strong and hard-headed a character as her brother, Geoffrey Bastwick, and such co-operation her son did not seem inclined to afford and yet the situation was one of such plain sailing.

There was one side of the said situation that seemed to occur to neither of them, and that was, that it had all more or less come out of their own inner consciousness, combined with Bastwick's innate satirical waggishness.

Derek Hilton's home for the time being, and, subordinately, his mother's, consisted of a pleasant house in a pleasant garden on the outskirts of a pleasant cathedral city, some hundred miles distant from the hard, rugged, granite fastnesses of Wood Bastwick and Bastwick Carrs. There he spent most of his time amusing himself in various ways.

The residue of his time was spent in town, amusing himself also in various ways. But the house had really nothing to distinguish it from other more or less sumptuous replicas of it, up and down the tree-shaded road, at any rate it isn't worth describing. It spelt sumptuousness, up-to-date comfort and high respectability, and that was all.

CHAPTER XIII

A JOKE FOR BASTWICK

THE month which had gone by since the receipt of a certain letter had seen Bastwick pass through some very strange veins of thought, had seen him do some erratic, not to say eccentric, things. The letter, as we remember, failed to set forth the name of the ship by which its writer intended to travel. This was a source of perplexity, still more so, that the said writer had, with a remissness which was truly extraordinary, likewise omitted even to name the port of sailing. There were several Australian ports, and the name that contained the numerous o's was probably some small inland township too insignificant to be set down on any map; at any rate, all search utterly failed to find it. Nor did it help him to make inquiries at the various mail and shipping lines, as to the vessels leaving approximately to the time named. The fact that the ship would take ten weeks to do the passage rendered it sure that she would not be a mail boat at any rate.

One of his eccentric doings was to read and re-read the letter, always in close privacy of course, till he knew it by heart. Another was to wander through

the upper part of the house, speculating as to which of the bedrooms would be the most cheery and comfortable, then for some days a sort of reaction would set in, and he was wondering whether it would not be best, after all, to leave the whole thing severely alone. Would it be wise to rake up dead ashes? Ah, but were they dead? Why the very existence of all this unsettlement seemed to point to the fact that they were not.

The said unsettlement did not pass unnoticed by Ethne and it gave her no small concern, as day after day went by and no confidences, no explanations on the subject were offered her. For the life of her she would not dream of asking for such, but she was anxious none the less, very anxious. A couple of mysterious runs up to town, rather added if anything to her anxiety. Had her relative discovered the existence of some fell and murderous organic complaint, which necessitated the consultation of this or that specialist? This was one of the conclusions to which her mind leaped. It began to sap her spirits. This Bastwick could not fail to perceive.

"What's the matter with you, dear?" he queried one day with that keen, searching glance. "You're not up to the mark, haven't been for some time."

"Well," she answered with a smile, plucking up courage. "That's just the very thing I've been thinking about you."

Bastwick stared. He had not given her credit for any great power of observation, and now it turned out she had been observing him all the time; closely, too, it had seemed.

"Oh, you mustn't bother about me," he said.

"Haven't you discovered yet that I have my moods?"

But she shook her head slowly. Having once mooted the subject she had gained courage.

"Oh yes, I do know your 'moods,' but somehow this has seemed different. You haven't—er—had reason to suppose—er—that there's anything the matter with you, have you?"

The thrill of anxiety, of affection, in her soft, deep voice—Ethne had a beautiful speaking voice—was so marked that he gazed at her in astonishment.

"No, no, little girl. Make your mind perfectly easy on that score. We all have our anxious moments, you know, and perhaps one of mine has been on me of late, but it needn't affect you. Here, get on your things, and we'll go for a stiff blow over the moors. That will take all this out of your head."

She was about to come downstairs again when a very unwonted sound met her ears. Her relative, whose mirth was by no means of a boisterous order, was now exploding in shouts of laughter. She found him seated in the library, where he had been opening his morning's correspondence.

"Oh, that's too screaming for words!" he ejaculated. "That fool of a woman will be the death of me yet. I can forgive her a great deal for affording me such a grin——Hullo, child! Ready? You've not been long."

"No. But whatever is the joke? It must be a good one anyway."

"Joke—joke? There never was such a joke. Ah, but I forgot. I can't tell it to you."

"Won't you tell it to me?" she said pleadingly,

making a very bright and irresistible picture standing in the frame of the doorway in her neat outdoor attire.

"Afraid I can't, dear, much as I would like to. It must remain between myself and one other party. Oh, but it's too good for anything."

We heard Mrs. Hilton announce her intention of pointing out to her brother that the time had come for making other arrangements with regard to Ethne. She had been as good as her word, and now the receipt of her communication had afforded Bastwick one of the most heartfelt bursts of laughter he had ever been guilty of in his life. He re-read the nonsensical effusion, and its stilted wording and tissue of pompous stupidities set him off in a renewed roar. In fact, he treated this missive as he had not treated one from the same source for many a long day, he read it through to the very end, and he was rewarded, in that he found cause for a fresh explosion of mirth in nearly every sentence: "Find another home for Ethne . . . too grown up . . . far too near each other's age."

"Ho, ho, ho!" shouted Bastwick again. "She needn't find another home till she finds another for herself, that's certain," he added to himself.

"Well, dear, but what is the joke? Won't you tell it to me now? Is it anything about Derek?" For she could not help seeing the writing, though she could not see the words, and she recognized the writing of Derek's mother.

"About Derek? No, even the great god Derek doesn't figure in this, marvellous to say. Well, I never knew that Mary could be funny before; screech-

ingly, killingly, funny; and in her old age too. Just shows how we misread people, doesn't it?"

"Well, if you can't tell me the joke you can't," smiled Ethne. "So if you're ready, come along."

"Oh, I'm ready," he answered, flinging the correspondence into a drawer and getting up. But even as they walked down the path, Bastwick kept every now and then shaking with the recollection of the prodigious joke. "Find another home for Ethne," he kept repeating to himself. And the girl may or may not have noticed that the hand passed through her arm as they walked, rested there with a trifle more of an affectionate pressure than usual.

"Talking of the great Derek," as, having gained the foot of the moor, he sat down on a rock in the shadow of Semon's Slabs to fill and light a pipe. "I fancy you gave him a flea in the ear the other morning; you know, the morning he was impudent and announced his very welcome intention of taking himself off. At first I thought it was the other way on."

Ethne laughed and coloured slightly. Here, on the very spot, that incident now took on a more ridiculous side than ever.

"Can you keep a secret, Uncle Geoff?" she said. "Yes, I know you can. Well, the fact is he did make something like what's commonly called a proposal, here, where we are now, but I didn't take it seriously."

"Why not? Think what a chance you've missed."

"Why not? Partly I suppose, because, at the

very moment that he was saying all those things, Derek was looking—well—absurd."

Bastwick laughed drily.

"Well, he oughtn't to have, he ought to be in good practice enough in that line, in all conscience. Ever since he has got out of Eton collars he's always had a 'skirt' of some sort on hand."

Both laughed and resumed their way. It may have been that through Bastwick's thoughts was running a recollection of that very morning, and the relief which had been his when he had soon discovered that there was no ground for his apprehensions. Looking back the said apprehensions seemed ridiculous to him now, but then we all have our "bad days," and that had been one of his, he supposed.

"Whirr-r!" A pack of grouse got up at their feet and scattered away over the heather, to light a quarter of a mile further down.

"That's odd," said Bastwick, shading his eyes, instinctively, to mark them. "The beggars must be two days out in their calculations, lying so close at the fag end of the season. Shall we send a wire to Derek to come and shoot the last day of the grouse season to-morrow, and to bring his mamma with him?" and again the speaker lashed out a whole-souled guffaw over the communication from Derek's said mamma that morning.

"No," she answered decisively. "If you want another gun, ask the rector. I don't want to be bothered with Derek, anyhow."

Bastwick walked on in silence, but he was thinking. He looked round upon the rolling stretches of brown heather interspersed here and there with

slabs of morose grey rock; upon the spread of meadow beneath, where the long-woolled, black-faced sheep and the long-horned, shaggy cattle grazed. He looked at his fortress-like dwelling, standing distant and high on its eminence beyond these, and all of a sudden some strange passing harp string of contrast seemed to thrill in his mind. The contrast between this northern sternness, and the "tang" of frost in the invigorating air, and the smoky glare of sunrise upon green oily sea, and thirst-stamped coast, forced itself upon him entirely, inconsequently, arbitrarily, unless it was that he had seen that opposite side of the picture, had moved in it. The clock of Potterton church tower down in the valley solemnly tolled forth the hour of midday.

"What are you thinking about, Uncle Geoff?" said Ethne. "You've been silent and solemn for quite a long while, and all the way up here you've been gurgling and chuckling over that wonderful joke that I'm not to hear," and she put on an air of mock aggrievement.

"Have I, child? Well, perhaps I was thinking of other times and other places in an earlier and less profitable phase of existence. I can't make out why on earth that vein of thought should have come over me, but it has. To tell the truth I am not given to dreaming as you know. Before you came, little Ethne, I used sometimes to think a good deal over things that brought neither pleasure nor profit. But I have given all that up for some time past."

"Well, there's no need, then, to go back to an old

bad habit," she answered, turning a bright sparkling face towards him.

"No, no! of course not. We're as jolly as we can be, aren't we?"

"Rather," she interpolated. "What could be better than this, for instance?" with a comprehensive glance around.

"So you are content then, little girl?" he said, "stewed away in this gloomy old place. Most of you wouldn't be."

"Why of course I am. Why shouldn't I be?"

"Oh, I don't know. That's your look out," he answered gaily. "But if you are, why that's all right, quite all right."

If Ethne found herself more than slightly wondering, she didn't say so. Her relative had not been wont to consult her inclinations in such a straight home matter as this, and with the thought another supervened. There had always been some sort of shadowy, indefinable gulf between them. Now this seemed bridged over, and a certain lack of sympathy which she had realized before, had all of a sudden seemed no longer to exist; nor could she understand wholly the thrill of pleasure, of delight even, which this consciousness gave her, but it was there all the same. She looked at the tall, fine figure, in its neat and appropriate homespun, with its firm, elastic step, striding down the moorland path in front of her, with entire approval. She recalled the time when she had first come to Wood Bastwick, at an awkward, angular age; rather frightened, decidedly over-awed, by the strong, reticent presence; an element of which awe had remained with her more

or less ever since. And with it, she recalled the reassuring kindness which had invariably gone out to her, in her then helpless and lonely state. Now she realized, realized suddenly, that that element of awe was a thing of the past. A certain subtle *rapprochement* had sprung into being between them which had dispelled such, now and for ever. As Derek's mother had said, and as Bastwick had read to his uncontrollable amusement, Ethne was now fully grown up.

And so they continued their round, chatting easily, gaily, on any subject. And as once more they found themselves climbing the steep path which led up to the house, and the distant bell from Potterton church tower tolled out the stroke of one, Bastwick was repeating to himself with cutting derision: "Find another home for Ethne. Ho! ho, ho!"

CHAPTER XIV

OF SOME FURTHER NEWS

BASTWICK had enjoyed his walk, enjoyed it thoroughly, and realizing this, he began to ask himself why. There was never a time when he could not draw a certain amount of enjoyment from the clear, bracing openness of his rugged domain, and this was more than doubled by a sense of congenial companionship, and now he had got this.

For, of late, he had come to realize more and more that this girl who had come to him in a rather shy and awkward stage had developed a mind. Of late especially he had noticed this. In short, she was now the very complete woman.

That being so, he found himself faced with considerable food for wonder. She had just professed herself wholly contented, and she had meant every word of it too, that was obvious. Other women and girls of his acquaintance in the neighbourhood were usually professing just the reverse. There were the rectory girls, for instance, they were always expressing discontent with the dulness of the life, and only too glad of a pretext of going away for a change, yet there were several of them, and they could and did keep each other lively. But here was

one girl, boxed up by herself, alone with him, who must be but sorry companionship for her, not to say depressing, and she professed herself contented. It is just possible that the thinker may have underestimated himself, but that didn't occur to him.

By this time he was beginning to find food for wonder from another source. He had written to the firm of ship-owners whose address Leland Goring had given him, and they had replied that a lady of that name had taken passage on a ship of theirs named the *Bonito*, from Sydney to Liverpool. This had been at first; he had had subsequent letters from the firm, informing him that that ship had been unaccountably delayed. She was not a fast boat, but still, she was considerably behind her time. However, they did not reckon that there was any cause for anxiety on that head, and Bastwick had duly felt reassured. But time had gone by, and he had watched the shipping list in the daily papers, but the movements of that particular craft had not been chronicled.

"Where are the papers, Ethne?" he said after lunch. "I hardly glanced at them this morning. That's the worst of it, one is a perfect slave to one's daily paper; let it get into arrear for just one day and it's a sort of compound interest job to pull it into line again."

"Oh, in the library as usual," she answered. "Let's go and see. Yes, here they are."

"Well, I'll look through them, if I don't go to sleep after that bracing, breezy bout of exercise of ours."

He flung himself into an armchair. At the

moment of leaving the room, Ethne caught a glimpse of the dragon head in the centre of the mantel, and it seemed to take on a specially baleful and malevolent stare. Its horrid eyes seemed to roll after her. But she laughed at herself, or tried to, as one who was afraid of a mere bit of wood.

Bastwick, left alone, turned his attention to the newspapers, but as he had predicted, he did so drowsily—in fact, he distinctly napped. Then awaking with a jerk and a start, something black jumped out at him from the crinkled page he held; only printers' ink, but still fraught with moment.

"*The SS. Bonito* (*Ryle & Gilstrap, owners*) *from Sydney to Liverpool, overdue.*"

He had begun upon the shipping list and dropped off in the middle of it. Now waking, the important part which he had missed started up and hit him. Heavens, and the owners had notified him that the ship was late, and now she was posted at Lloyds as overdue.

Well, what then? She might have broken down in mid-Atlantic—she would probably be a second-rate kind of hooker, anyhow—propeller shaft gone perhaps, helpless accordingly, but not far out of the track of shipping if at all. She would be certain to be picked up. That sort of thing happened every week. What was the use of worrying about it? He would not worry. But looking up, the gargoyle head opposite seemed to wink as though daring him not to do so.

It was a curious thing, Bastwick thought to himself, but when once you started bothering about other people there was an end of your peace. And

here was another person, whom he had not set eyes on for eight years, who had played it down very shabbily on him even then, and yet he had been bothering himself about that particular person, more or less, ever since the receipt of her letter.

He got up and went outside, through the stable-yard to where a door opened into a walled garden. This garden was on the slope of the high knoll, whereon the house was—probably with foresight—built. It fronted the southern sun, and there were the usual useless pear trees spreadeagled on its wall; pear trees grown for producing stones that is, if they produced anything at all. Still, this particular garden made a convenient retreat, where no one would ever think of looking for you, in the event of any bore taking it into his—or her—head to pay an afternoon call; and with the exception of the rector, who was a sportsman and possessed of a fund of dry wit, the neighbourhood simply fructified in bores.

Bastwick filled and lighted a second pipe, as he strolled up and down the box-fringed walk. He was thinking of the one passenger on board the overdue ship, and now he was not thinking of her anxiously at all. That curious variation of mood had come upon him now, under which he had as often as not told himself that he was a fool to take any notice of her letter. Why should he have done so? He was all right as he was, why go out of his way to import what might be a disturbing element under the circumstances? That was it. Why go out of his way? The writer of that letter had never gone out of her way on his account. In fact, it

had been partly on that very ground that they had split. And now after all these years, he seemed to be gliding into just that very position again. No, he would not do it. A hard, bitter frame of mind was fast coming over him, and there were times when he would work himself into such, on the spring of an idea, so to say, and this was just what he was doing now. And precisely when he was in this vein, the door in the garden wall opened and Ethne entered.

What was this? The effect of her appearance was soothing. She looked so fresh and cool and—so wholly attractive as she came along the path towards him.

"Oh, here you are," she said. "I thought you were still stewing away over the papers under that wretched Jabberwock head on a lovely afternoon like this for December, and was afraid of my life to disturb you. But Cherriman said you had come out this way, so I 'made so bold' as to track you down."

"Oh, you 'made so bold,' did you? and why so bold? Hadn't you enough of a crusty old fossil this morning?"

"Well, no, I hadn't, if you must know, and, dear, you were hoisting signals of impending 'Dismal Jimmy' since lunch, so I thought you 'didn't ought to' be left alone."

He looked at the bright smiling face and something of a glow burned around his heart. This child was full of consideration and—how pretty she had grown, and what a way, all soothing and sympathetic, she had on her.

"Ah, ah," he said, "you are rather a record, little Ethne. What do you want to do now? Go and play croquet at the Rectory or what?"

"No, I don't, I want to stop with you. You are getting into a 'Dismal Jimmy' vein, as I said before. I don't know what it's about, but that doesn't matter. We'll do anything you like or not do anything at all, which shall it be?"

"We'll not, I think," opening a door in the further wall. "At present we'll stroll down to Mathers'. I think we'll convene the devil-dodger for the last shoot to-morrow, and I'll see Mathers about it, if he's there."

The keeper was there. A chorus of barkings and yelpings from the kennels greeted their advent. Mathers, chopping wood in front of his cottage, looked up and likewise greeted it.

"End of the grouse to-morrow, Mathers. Think we'll get Dr. Staley for another gun. Think he'll be free?"

"A weel, sir, I dinna ken. A'm thinkin' that the country priest is always free. But I'm nae a believer in priests shootin'——"

Bastwick chuckled.

"Oh, blazes take it, Mathers," he interrupted. "We've been over all that before, and if this particular priest happens to be free, all the jollier for him. And why the devil shouldn't he have a good shoot on the last day of the grouse year? No, no, Mathers, you're an excellent citizen, but you've got a prejudiced mind—do you hear? a prejudiced mind, which is bad for any self-respecting Scot"—it will be remembered that Mathers was a privileged ser-

vant. "You must get out of it. Your people wouldn't have control of all the banks in the English-speaking world if *they* hadn't got out of it."

"Ay, sir. I'll nae be sayin' that the Doctor can't shoot, and shoot better than some others who come here wounding a lot o' birds."

This was a nasty shot at our friend Derek Hilton, and therefore ought not to have been fired, but then, as we have just said, Mathers was a privileged servant. Incidentally he did not love the Squire's nephew.

"All right then, that's settled," said Bastwick. "And you'd better bring out your gun too, Mathers. We can do with three, and it's too late to beat about the bush sending invites to people who are sure to make some excuse. Good afternoon."

Amid a parting kennel chorus they resumed their way.

"By the way," said Bastwick, "as we're on the hoof we may as well pad down to Potterton and see if Staley's on by way of making sure."

"Well, I haven't got on a hat," said Ethne. "But that doesn't matter I suppose."

"Hardly. The British public, as represented in Potterton, ought to be accustomed to you by this time, and incidentally to me."

They gained the village of Potterton, owned mostly by Bastwick. The river was tumbling in spate under the old stone bridge. The grey square church tower, not a picturesque one particularly, loomed against the darkening December sky. The rectory windows, ablaze with light, seemed to speak of abundance, presence, and cheerfulness.

"That's all right, they're all in," said Bastwick. "Now for a racket."

Two girls pounced upon them with the first ring of the bell, while a third hove in sight from the background. The whole trinity thereupon started talking and laughing at once.

"Oh, these Three Disgraces," said Bastwick with a laugh. "Well, and what have you all got to say? Only say it one at a time."

But this is just what the trio was incapable of doing. It wasn't used to it, in short—couldn't have done it to save its life. So amid the general babel, the two new arrivals found themselves borne into an inner room, where sat Dr. and Mrs. Staley and—Derek Hilton.

The rector was one of Bastwick's few neighbours—in fact, the only one—with whom he was really on anything like fairly intimate terms. Without being what is commonly known as a sporting parson, he was exceedingly fond of sport when it came his way; it was chiefly with the rod that he excelled, and in this line (no pun extended) Bastwick used to say that he took off his hat to him. He was a genial, easy-mannered man with more than any one man's share of dry humour.

"I've invaded you with a purpose, Staley," said Bastwick, having shaken hands with the two of them. "Come and kill some of the last grouse of the season to-morrow—— Hullo, why there's Derek."

The latter had got up and was standing looking rather a fool. It is a bit awkward, you see, when a man with whom you parted in a rage and on terms that would practically leave you "at cuts" sud-

denly runs into you in the middle of a mutual crowd, and Derek wasn't quite equal to the situation. So, according to his age, he looked sulky and thus looking he shook hands with his kinsman with the air of one who would much rather not.

"Thanks, Bastwick," said the rector. "That's an attractive programme of yours. I should like to do a few more misses up on the moor before the season shuts down."

Bastwick laughed.

"Misses?" he said. "Why, Mathers was just booming you no end as a shot, and if Mathers booms any one as a shot, especially a priest, why there you are. So roll up at half-past ten to-morrow. Got your gun, Derek?"

"Er—no—no, I haven't," answered that youth, trying to stand on his dignity.

"Oh well, I can rig you up with one. Half-past ten's the time."

Derek mumbled something. Bastwick could not quite catch what it was, but it did not matter either way. And then the four girls trooped in, three of them at any rate, all talking and laughing at once as their way was, one treading on the tail of a recumbent dog on the hearthrug which added its yelps to the condolent squeals. And then tea was brought in, and other things, and everybody was comfortable all round. Bastwick and the rector lighted their pipes and were in full blast on the subject of sport, chiefly on the forthcoming river prospects, as far, that is, as they could make themselves heard amid the youthful and vociferous strife of tongues. Derek was glum and talking to Mrs. Staley in an aloof sort

of way, but nobody minded this. Evidently the rectory girls were used to him, and Bastwick certainly was. Finally the latter and Ethne took their leave and their way home.

"Do you think Derek will come?" said Ethne when they got beyond the chorus of farewells.

"I hadn't given it a thought, but as he was there I'd got to ask him, He can jolly well please himself. I'm tired of him, anyhow."

CHAPTER XV

DEREK IN EARNEST

CHRISTMAS had come and gone. It was an old-fashioned Christmas, old-fashioned to the tune of a hard, black frost, without its accompanying and counteracting nuisance of snow. Consequently the glassy surface of Potterton mere had yielded rare sport. So thought especially Derek Hilton, who had been showing forth his elastic proportions to all sorts of advantage; especially he flattered himself when gyrating along with Ethne at about twenty miles an hour on the outside edge. She was in high favour again with this sucking sultan, with whom the rectory girls were out of it for the time being. For Derek was displeased with them. He had scented some unpardonable lack of appreciation of his dignity, which was sufficient to throw them altogether out of favour. It may be added that this catastrophe caused neither each nor all of them the faintest falling off in either appetite or sleep.

Bastwick, by some whimsical turn of mind, had invited his sister and Derek to spend a few days around Christmas with him. He had said to himself, also to Ethne, that they would afford good fun in character study. Derek had accepted the invite

to the final grouse shoot extended to him during that chance meeting at the rectory. He chose to look upon it as an implied apology on the part of his uncle which he was graciously pleased to entertain, and in the sequel, he and his mother had been invited to Wood Bastwick to make up a Christmas party of four.

Herein Mrs. Hilton had thought to descry her opportunity. She had not quite recovered from the good-humoured and sarcastic—very good-humoured but very sarcastic—reply she had received from her brother on the subject of Ethne's change of residence. She defined the invite as providential. It would be hard now, if she could not secure Bastwick's ear on the subject. She did secure it but—she very much wished she had not, after five minutes' conversation relating thereto. Bastwick by post could be trenchant, Bastwick face to face could be razor blade. So the good woman was reduced to lachrymose despair and—poisonously hated Ethne.

To make matters worse, this is just what Derek did not. He had come there full of intention to carry out his mother's scheme, but—once there, that scheme seemed to branch out upon another road, for the few days spent under the same roof with Ethne had effected a change. He had genuinely fallen in love with the girl.

Why had he not done so before? He had fancied himself in love with her when he had made that abortive and premature declaration at Semon's Slabs. He did not know how it had come about. What was there different about her now to what there had been then? He could hardly have told. Yet there

was a something. Some subtle change seemed to have come over her. She seemed to have grown more serious, more matured. A kind of gracious serene happiness seemed to enhalo her, radiating on all around. He could not make it out at all, such a change in so short a time. But it rendered her infinitely desirable. He looked back on his former butterfly fooling with disgust. He realized that he was now genuinely, seriously in love.

Then like a dash of cold water came upon him his mother's scheme, his mother's suspicions, and he found himself watching Bastwick in a furtive, rancorous way; watching his every movement, appraising his every tone. What if his mother had been right after all. Bastwick stood at every advantage. He and Ethne were obviously on the most affectionate of terms, and spent life under the same roof, whereas he, Derek, was a mere outsider, and only here on sufferance. Again, the other, from a physical point of view, had every advantage. He remembered his scornful rejoinder to his mother's suggestion. "Pooh! why he's old enough to be her father," and now especially when he saw the two together, he recognized that his dictum had been absurd.

"You're not playing the game right, Derek," said Mrs. Hilton one day when they were alone together. "Why don't you? Eh?"

"It takes two to play a game," he answered savagely. "What if the second of the two won't play?"

"Why then the first of the two must make her."

"Make her? I suppose you've heard the old

copy-book chestnut about taking a horse to the water. Pah! look there."

His mother did look. From the open window, they could see Bastwick approaching from the walled garden. His hand was through the girl's arm, and they were talking animatedly, with every now and then a ripple of laughter from one of them.

Derek's heart was swelling with black, jealous rage. To do him justice he had quite lost sight now of the aim and object of their plotting. He wanted the girl for her own sake, entirely for her own sake. Wood Bastwick and Bastwick Carrs might go to the deuce if only he could win her. Sooner or later it wou'd come to him in any case. But to this he hardly gave a thought, as he watched the pair with brooding, jealous eyes as they drew near the front door, apparently on the best of terms with themselves and all the world.

His mother watched them too, from her point of view with anger and resentment. What business had Geoffrey, at his time of life, to set himself between the natural affections of the young? It was disgusting, unnatural. She indeed did not lose sight of the objective of her plotting and planning. She had been prompt to discover how Derek's heart had changed to all seriousness. Well, so much the better, she decided. Still less would he be likely to be done out of his inheritance in that case. But now if her suspicions were correct, it was, humanly speaking, certain that he would. In her fury of mind she made a resolve to speak to her brother again. But, oh no. She was nakedly, undisguisedly, afraid; and yet, and yet, a sudden

intrepidity came over her, something akin to that of a naturally timid animal which saw itself robbed of its young. She thought she would put the matter plainly before Geoffrey and point out the desirability of an alliance between these young people. Yes, depend upon it, that was the wisest course, then at any rate she would know or could guess how matters stood.

She saw the two come in at the front door below, she heard their voices mingling, still in jest and animated converse. She heard them separate in the hall and the library door shut, and her mind was made up.

"You had better go down, Derek," she said, "and get Ethne to practise some accompaniments or something with you. There's a matter I want to talk to your uncle about."

"Hullo—er—not about this business?" was the answer, given with sudden suspicion.

"No, no, of course not," she replied, with easy feminine mendacity. "It is about one of my investments. You go and make hay while the sun shines."

"Bally little sunshine about it," he answered moodily.

Mrs. Hilton opened the library door, not without considerable trepidation. The expression upon her brother's face as he looked up was not exactly a welcoming one.

"I wanted to talk to you, Geoffrey," she began, "about those shares of mine in the Pellusite Company."

"Well, what about them? Ain't they all right—four and a half per cent. and a good going concern?"

The answer was short, and not at all encouraging. Then she maundered on in a way that to a man who understood business was idiotic and exasperating to a degree. Then her purely imaginary misgivings having been curtly set at rest, she came to the point —her point.

"There's another little matter I wanted to consult you about, dear Geoffrey, and that is about Derek."

"Oh, about Derek? Well, and what about Derek? I'm not his trustee, you know, thank God for that same."

Mrs. Hilton was more than nettled, but it was not politic to show it—even the most stupid women have a dim glimmering of what is politic, at times,—so she went on deprecatingly—

"I'm afraid the poor boy is in rather a bad way."

Bastwick looked up sharply.

"Bad way, is he!" he retorted. "Well, I'm not surprised, I always told you, Mary, that you were raising that pup in a way calculated to ruin any pup, even one with the best intentions. What's the matter with him? Outrun the constable or been captured by a 'skirt'? That's the worst kind of hole to be landed in, and the most difficult to be hooked out of. Silly young ass!"

At this rather savage assault on her one and only hopeful, the other bridled up.

"Well, I don't see why you should be so down on him, Geoffrey. The boy is a good boy as boys go, quite a good boy."

"Oh, I'm not impugning his morals, of which I know nothing. He may be a perfect Sunday-school

paragon for all I know, but you said just now that he was in a bad way and wanted to talk to me about it. Now what class of a 'bad way' is he in?"

"Haven't you seen for yourself? Surely you have"; and she paused, looking at him in a way that was meant to be arch.

"Well, I haven't then," was the blunt reply.

"Why, he's over head and ears in love with Ethne."

"Pho! Why, he's been over head and ears in love with all sorts and conditions of young females—and, to be accurate, one middle-aged one who used hair dye—ever since I've had the honour of his adolescent acquaintance. One more or less is a matter of no account."

Here was a facer. Mrs. Hilton was staggered. She had reckoned on breaking a bit of news to her brother which would stir that worthy up to wrath, or bring down some nasty crushing rejoinder, but instead of either he had treated it with the airiest of contempt.

"But look here, Geoffrey," she went on, "the boy's happiness is very dear to me, although I know you don't like him."

"Let him make himself likeable and I'll have a try," answered the other wearily. "Well, what the dickens do you want me to do in the matter, Mary? In fact, where do I come into it, anyhow? It's no concern of mine."

"Well, I thought you might perhaps—er—throw in the weight of your influence with Ethne. Really, Derek is quite in earnest this time. I know, of course

he's had a lot of silly flirtations, but this is genuine, believe me."

Bastwick's face was a study in dumb joke. Then he burst into a laugh, rather an unpleasant one.

"This is getting too funny," he said. "Why only the other day you were urging upon me that I ought to find another home for Ethne, and now you're urging upon me to use my influence upon her in a given direction. To do this I must keep her here with me? How do you reconcile it?"

The poor lady felt cornered. What could she do against a sarcastic, satirical and, above all, logical specimen of male humanity such as this?

"But don't you see," she urged, "it would be to the advantage of both of them?"

"No, I don't. On the contrary, it would be to the advantage of neither."

"And why not, may I ask?"

"Keep your temper, Mary. For one thing they are too much alike in colouring and all that—I'm a believer in Nature's contrasts—for another thing I don't want to hurt your feelings, but your paragon Derek needs a great deal more nonsense knocked out of him before it would be to any one's advantage to make a life alliance with him."

Mrs. Hilton could hardly contain her rage. The rather sneering tone, the utter coolness with which her brother treated the subject might well have been more than provocative to any woman, even if above the average, which she was not. Now she fairly lost her temper.

'Are you sure, Geoffrey, that you are quite so im-

partial, disinterested, in this matter as you would have it seem ? "

" Explain, for I don't see where the interest comes in and you said disinterested, for to begin with what possible interest can I have in Derek's love affairs ? "

The calm stare, the calmness of the tone, flabbergasted her for the moment. Then she grew more vicious.

" But supposing it's an interest in Ethne's love affairs ? " she flashed forth.

" Well, of course, that *would* be interesting," he answered in the same cool, even tone. " But I don't know that she has any ; at any rate, she hasn't told me."

" No. She might be waiting for some one else to tell *her*," retorted the other with venomous significance.

" Possibly. Most girls do, don't they, Mary ; at any rate, they did when you were a girl ? Though I believe times and things have advanced since."

What was to be done with a man like this ? Innuendo, satire were alike utterly lost on him, incidentally poor Mary's " satire " as she called it was about as potent to stir her brother as the bleat of a wayside sheep. She felt helpless, crushed, cornered.

" Then you won't use your influence with Ethne ? " she concluded somewhat lamely.

Bastwick half laughed.

" My influence ? Ha ! ha ! Reminds one of the old joke in *Miles Standish*. Why doesn't Derek use his own influence ? I take it that's the prime influence to be used in a matter of this kind."

"What's the good of that if you use your influence against him?"

"Use my grandmother. My dear good woman, here he has been a week, morning, noon and night, under the same roof, and will be another week"—"most confounded worse luck," he added to himself—"and with all those facilities, if he stands in need of a third party's 'influence' he must be a bigger fool than even I take him for. There they are. He has every opportunity. Why doesn't he put it to Ethne herself?"

"Oh, you recommend that, do you?" she said, as though catching at a straw.

"Why certainly. It's the straightest way of knowing where he is."

"Well, yes, yes, perhaps, perhaps," she answered, utterly puzzled by this way of taking things. She thought rather to reduce him to confusion, to anger perhaps, by what she flattered herself was her insidious but telling insinuation, instead of which they might have been discussing the love affair of some distant acquaintance.

"I've got a lot of stuff to do, Mary, if you'll excuse me," said her brother, by way of terminating the interview.

There was nothing more to be gained if she talked all day, so the poor lady went out with an abject, not to say crushing, sense of failure, not unmixed with a feeling that her brother was right. Why should not Derek manage his own affairs, she thought resentfully? But then it never occurred to her that Derek had not asked her to manage them for him.

CHAPTER XVI

CRONSHAW'S LEAP

ETHNE was puzzled, but not a little disconcerted. Needless to say, she had noticed a change in Derek's manner towards herself. Needless, equally, to say, she had easily guessed at the cause. In a way it was an improvement. He bated his natural bumptiousness when with her, and possibly on the principle of love me love my dog, he failed to manifest it towards his uncle. Now all this should have been subject matter for congratulation, and yet it was not.

As the time drew near for Derek's departure she grew more and more nervous. She felt instinctively that he would repeat that declaration which she had turned off so lightly on that former occasion, but that this time there would be an element of earnestness about it which was not so lightly to be turned off, and she shrunk from the task of having to turn it off.

It was the day before the departure of Derek and his mother. Ethne stood in the hall lounge. She was in her neat, outdoor costume and held a walking stick in her hand, and—surely history was going to repeat itself. Her companion now was

identical with her companion on that other notable occasion.

Derek had avoided the mistake he had fallen into on the occasion which had caused the temporary estrangement between him and his uncle. He had consulted the latter as to whether Ethne would be likely to be wanted and received such a gracious reply in the negative as had made him stare, and set him wondering whether his mother had not evolved all her suspicions out of her own inner consciousness.

"Ready, Ethne?" he broke out breezily as he appeared on the scene. "Right. Come along then, we'll have no end of a jolly walk. We'll go up on the moor as far as Cronshaw's Leap, that'll make a good step out, won't it?"

"The very thing," she answered, "quite the very thing. The afternoons are beginning to draw out longer."

The brisk readiness with which she assented to the suggestion was born of a feeling of relief. Cronshaw's Leap constituted a fairly distant objective for an afternoon ramble, especially on a short winter day, and would certainly necessitate the good step out which he had declared it would afford. That pace does not accommodate itself to the ventilation of serious or momentous subjects, wherein she saw respite.

And indeed so it seemed destined to prove. For as they stepped out briskly in their glow of youthful health and strength through the bracing northern air, Ethne had no reason to complain of any tendency towards gloom or seriousness on the part of

her companion. She now began to wonder whether she had been mistaken, and the feeling of constraint and nervousness began to wear away. He chatted on incessantly and told more or less funny anecdotes, cracked jokes, and in short, acted as one who had not a care in the world. No; decidedly Ethne felt relieved.

They had penetrated quite a good way into the moor now. Great rolling billows of brown heather shut them in. A dead silence lay around, broken suddenly by a flock of screaming peewits, which, springing from the heather, whirled and circled above their heads, uttering their chiding clamour. Then they too were gone, leaving again silence.

"We have had a jolly time, Ethne," began Derek, "I feel quite Dismal Jimmy at the idea of clearing out to-morrow."

Ethne groaned mentally. Now it was coming, she thought. He was beginning to switch on the serious.

"It was awfully jolly of Uncle Geoff to ask us," he went on, "especially as I was—er—rather beastly to him that other time. Oh, I suppose we misunderstood each other."

"Not a doubt about it," she answered decisively. "Well, never mind about that now"; and she turned the conversation off on to lighter themes. And thus chatting they gained a place where the smooth undulation of the heather rolls split abruptly into a high narrow fissure cleaving the heart of the slope in front of them. It was a curious arbitrary freak of Nature, this sudden cleft, for the surrounding surface was not rocky, yet the walls of this strange

narrow chasm faced each other to a height of nearly a hundred feet, faced each other nearly perpendicularly at a width of barely four yards. It was not even a watercourse, so that its *raison d'être* was not a little strange.

They climbed upwards, skirting the edge of the fissure, till they reached the highest point of the opposing cliffs, and looked down into a shadowy gloom which was almost darkness.

"This place always strikes me as rummier every time I come up to it," said Derek, idly chucking a stone or two over the brink on which they stood. Why is it, by the bye, that one's first instinct when standing on the brink of a height, is to launch somethng over it—unless one is or has been an Alpine climber? Anyhow these two were both following out that very instinct, with stones, and yet hardly conscious of it.

"Cronshaw's Leap," he went on. "Do you believe that story, Ethne?"

"Oh, I don't know. I daresay these old yarns have some substratum of truth."

This story, by the way, was, that one Cronshaw, very far back in the dim past, was undergoing pursuit by reason of one of those particular and ruthless murders for which, to judge by the old chronicler, the simple and pastoral folk about here were justly famous. His pursuers were mounted and he was not, and they had hunted him higher and higher up the moors until they had pressed him right against the brink of this chasm. It was neck or nothing, for he was completely outflanked, so he elected for neck. Without a moment's hesitation he took the

gap in a flying leap, here at its highest point. This gave him an advantage in that it was a check to the pursuers, who hesitated to put their mounts at so neck or nothing a jump, and before they had time to ride down to where the chasm ended on either side, a thick moorland mist rolled up with the suddenness wherewith such mists do roll up, and their quarry escaped. Of course all sorts of legendary matter was piled up around this probably legendary feat, among them that the performer on certain nights returned to earth to repeat it. Whether this was so or not remained open. Those who believed it was would not have put it to the test by going to see, for very large bribes, while those who did not so believe would certainly not take the trouble to turn out and make a cold, tiresome expedition up the moors and, incidentally, fools of themselves, on any given midnight. So it remained at that, but among the former class, with the ingrained superstition of the country folk, it was certainly deemed not precisely lucky to go near the place oftener than you could help.

The afternoon was somewhat lowering and still, but clear, with here and there a fitful gleam of sunshine throwing out the sad waste of brown, billowy heather, and morose grey rock slab in near relief. The crack across the great dome of brown moorland opened black like a grim and ancient mouth. Two carrion crows croaked overhead, their black silhouettes picked out clear against the grey sky. It was altogether a weird and impressive figure of solitude, and on it Ethne remarked, but the other laughed.

"Oh, bother all these Dismal Jimmy effects. Let me see—'light and shade,' don't you call it?" he answered with a laugh. "Why, it's simply a cloudy day instead of a fine one, that's all. Nothing to get the hump about in that."

There was Derek all over, thought Ethne. He had no more imagination than a month old calf. "A primrose by the river brim, etc.," exactly met his case. He had no soul for surroundings whatever, which was provoking, because she had. Just now he was restless, but she vastly preferred that to his becoming serious.

"I say, Ethne," he broke in, "what do they say this jump of old Cronshaw's is?—across, I mean."

"Why ten or twelve feet about."

"That's nothing very wonderful in the way of long jump. Why, I've done as good as that myself both at school and 'Varsity."

They were sitting right on the edge of the chasm looking down into its sombre depths. Ethne, with a certain amount of awe, the other simply measuring the gap to himself and comparing it with other jumping feats. Yes, he thought he could do it.

"I've gone one better than this in my time, Ethne," he said, taking off his coat and eyeing the mouth of the chasm with the light of newborn determination in his face. Then he retired some twenty paces back and made a preliminary run to the brink.

"No, that won't do," he decided, "I must have a longer run for that take off."

"Why, what are you going to do, Derek?" cried Ethne, suddenly awaking to the situation.

"Oh, nothing. You sit tight. Perhaps I'm going to try a little experiment in competition."

"Why, you're never going to be so foolish as——"

"You sit tight, and you'll see."

Now it's one thing for an athletic young specimen of English manhood to execute a ten or twelve foot long jump measured and marked out on green terra firma, but it's quite another to perform the same feat where no terra firma lies beneath, but instead a straight drop of nearly a hundred feet should you jump short. Therein comes the triumph of mind over matter; the distance, i.e. matter, is the same, but perchance the mind funks, wherein perhaps lies a paradoxical instance of funk triumphing. In this case, however, Derek had measured his distance, and now with a light springy run, not pausing at his take off, he cleared the chasm with the ease of a bird upon the wing, yet not quite, for he just managed to secure foothold on the other side, dislodging earth and stones, to fall rattling down into the depths.

Ethne had sat watching this performance spellbound. She had not had time to do or say anything to prevent it, even if she had thought he would persist in performing so foolhardy and intrepid a feat; foolhardy because so utterly useless, intrepid in the wrong place.

"Even with old Cronshaw," called out Derek from the other side. "Now I'm coming back."

"No, you're not," cried Ethne. "I think you're a perfect fool, and let me tell you I don't admire that sort of thing in the least. Do you hear?

You're not to do it, it's all sheer swagger and bounce, and not in the least impressive. No, stay that side and come down to where the cleft ends. I'll bring your coat down for you, though you don't even deserve that." She was angry. She had had a moment of very bad scare, and the reaction brought anger, and now there was something that reminded Derek of her outburst beneath the old Gibbet that day when his gun had gone off by accident.

"Oh, all right," he shouted back sulkily. "After that inspiriting *douche* of cold water I wouldn't attempt to jump a yard, so come along. I'll join you down below."

He felt all resentful again. He had thought to impress her, but instead of doing so had only incurred abuse, contempt, he told himself. So these two walked back downhill one on each side of the chasm to where the latter merged into level ground again.

"I must say, Ethne, you are a record encouragement to 'deeds of derring-do,'" he began huffily, as they joined each other.

"I prefer deeds of 'sensible don't,'" was the uncompromising reply. "If there had been any object in that sort of thing, getting some one out of a risky position, for instance, there'd have been something in it. As it is, it was a mere case of showing off."

He did not answer, he began to whistle a tune. He was cross, quite accidentally she had brought about the very side of the situation which she most desired. There would be no sentiment now. Derek cross could not become Derek sentimental—in fact,

the said Derek began to think he had made an ass of himself. So their afternoon, which had started in sunshine, seemed likely to end in cloud.

Cloud, yes. For now, as they walked along side by side in silence—Derek's dignity was far too much ruffled for him to volunteer any remark—a shadow, a darkness, a sort of cold, creeping chill, seemed to have crept over their way.

"Hullo," exclaimed Derek, looking up. "By Jove, here's a fog coming on. We must get out of this as fast as possible."

"We must indeed," she answered.

They were, as we have said, in a deepish hollow, and as though moved by the hand of some demon of the moor, the mist was creeping down upon them on every side, the thick heavy moorland mist rolling on in opaque curtain-like folds. Already it was sweeping over the crag gap of Cronshaw's Leap, which gaped now above and behind them to seemingly twice its real height. Lower and lower the darkening curtain swept. Then the gap itself was completely blotted from view, while as for the pretence of a path in front of them, they could no longer distinguish it at all.

CHAPTER XVII

IN COLD AND DARKNESS

THE pair stood looking into each other's faces The whole world seemed blotted out to them They were in the midst of a dank, blank void ; worse still, it was becoming more and more a dark void, for the days were nearly at their shortest, and these two had got through far more time than they had reckoned.

Derek looked at his watch.

" Past four," he declared, " and it's jolly well dark soon after half-past. The thing is, shall we be able to find the way ? Of course if we go on keeping downwards, we are bound to come out sooner or later."

But Ethne was not of quite the same opinion. Her idea was that they should return to Cronshaw's Leap. They had given out that this would be the objective of their walk, consequently those who came out in search of them , as some most assuredly would, would head straight for that point.

Derek raised no objection, and so they set forth to find their way back, but this course, though easy enough to determine upon, proved not so easy of execution. When they turned to retrace their

steps Cronshaw's Leap might have been blotted out of existence, or the approaches to it.

They took a dozen steps upward, then halted—even those dozen steps were taken with very much the gait of those who are blindfolded or who are walking in the dark. And indeed these two were very nearly walking in the dark, for the afternoon had drawn down with ominous rapidity. In a very short while night would be here, to complete the utterly bewildering capacity of the mist. To make matters worse, as they struck upwards there was no vestige of a path visible, leading either to Cronshaw's Leap or anywhere else.

"Well, we must find it," said Ethne. "You look this way and I'll look that."

Even Derek recognized that this was an insane suggestion.

"No, no," he announced with decision. "That will never do at all. We can't afford to separate in this thickness, not even for a dozen yards."

"But if we keep shouting?" she urged.

"Even then. No, we must stick together."

The dark rime was settling down upon the heather bents with the effect of a shower of rain. Ethne's thick walking-boots even were becoming penetrated, as they toiled their way upwards and onwards. So far neither were cold, thanks to the hard exercise, but after walking thus for half an hour or more Derek called a halt.

"I believe my plan was the best after all," he said, "to strike downwards. We should have got out of this then, depend upon it, sooner or later. Let's begin now."

"Oh yes. I'm tired of this uphill walk. I don't think I can go much further," she answered, piteously.

"Here! look here, let me help," he urged. "You hang on to me for all you're worth," drawing her arm through his.

Certainly here he was useful. And but for his strong young help Ethne would have come more than one headlong tumble—in fact, both of them more than once nearly did so, as they plunged downwards through the rough unevenness of the heather.

"We shall get out of it directly, as I thought," said Derek encouragingly. "Depend upon it the right tack was to take the downward track; and now we're on it, well, we'll stick to it."

But alas for the sanguine! Hardly had he uttered the words than the said downward track came to an end. The ground sloped abruptly upward in front of them, and whichever way they tried there was no downward track. A little of this and both realized that they were hopelessly lost; and then the darkness fell completely.

Derek's heart sank. Here was a prospect. A long, cold, damp winter's night up here on the moors, with neither food nor drink nor even a pretence at shelter. When through sheer exhaustion they would be compelled to sit down and rest, then the searching damp cold would become ten times more piercing. How would Ethne stand it? How on earth would she stand it? Of a truth he, they, had reached the limit.

"Now it's time to rest from this clamber, Ethne," he said. "We'd better just get to the top of this

rise, and then when they come to look for us later on they'll be able to hear us better if we shout, than if we were on the lower, more sheltered ground."

She agreed wearily, and they stumbled on, still upward, he leading.

Then, suddenly, with an energy and strength of which she hardly seemed capable, Ethne had flung herself back, dragging him with her, and not a moment too soon, for a waft of air, drawn funnel-wise, had partly curled asunder the mist before them. There but two yards in front of their feet, dim, but yet distinct, was the lip of Cronshaw's Leap. Three steps more and——

There was no mistake as to what would have happened—as to what had happened. Derek stared blankly, then whistled.

" I should be a goner but for you, Ethne," he said, looking into her frightened eyes. The agitation, the excitement, of this sudden happening had brought the colour to her cheeks and standing there in the thick damp embraces of the moorland mist, she was looking wondrously pretty, more so, Derek realized, than he had ever seen her look before.

" Well," she answered, recovering self-possession, " before, you risked your neck trying to jump across the gap, now you wanted to make the risk a certainty by taking a header into it," finishing off with a pallid attempt at mirth.

" You never spoke a truer word," he answered very gravely. " But for you I should be lying smashed up down there this moment ; " and then he relapsed into silence. For once in his life Derek was tongue-tied. He did not in the least know what to

say. Some instinct warned him against improving the occasion to renew his former proposal. It was not the moment; even he had the gumption to recognize that.

"Who'd have thought we'd have found our way back to Cronshaw's Leap," remarked Ethne. "When we tried to we couldn't, now we've been wandering round in a sort of circle, as they say lost people always do, and found it by accident. Our best plan is to stay here. Uncle Geoff's sure to send out—to come out—in search of us."

"Yes, yes, of course," assented Derek, wondering in what quiet, savage, sarcastic terms that relative would express his opinion of him.

But that would keep. Meanwhile the darkness had become real darkness. There was no moon, of course, and of stars not a trace. And now the damp, bitter cold began to strike, and strike hard.

Ethne shivered violently. Her companion, strive as he would to repress it, did very little short of the same.

"Shall we walk up and down a bit to keep up the circulation," he suggested.

"I can't. I'm dead tired. I can hardly stand on my legs, let alone walk."

"Well, well, let's sit down then; we must sit pretty close together too, it will be warmer that way." He put an arm round her, and contrived to cover her with part of his coat; he could keep her warmer that way than if he had taken it off and wrapped her in it altogether.

It seemed that both fell into a kind of doze, the cold and fatigue had simply exhausted the girl.

Derek was filled with dreadful misgivings. What if she—well, there were instances when people had been lost, and cold and exposure had led to the worst. It didn't matter to him, he was or ought to be more or less hard.

Aroused from her brief dose, Ethne shivered more violently, then went to sleep again, for which he was thankful. As for himself, young, hard as he was or ought to be, this bitter, piercing damp cold began to eat into his vitals. If only they could move, make another attempt to find the way, anything. But no, they must simply sit here and wait. The thought was maddening, galling to him. The night had become as dark as night could be, and the wreaths of the damp and shrouding mist were overhanging them like a pall. The girl was physically incapable of another effort, and it was simply a case of sitting still to wait. There was another danger, too, if they were to move about. There was more than one perilous bog lying in certain hollows of the moor, and to get into such, well, the position they were now in was one of ease and security in comparison. Another hour had sped, Derek resisted an inclination to light a match and consult his watch, lest the slightest movement should arose his companion, now fortunately blissfully asleep. So he sat on heroically motionless, doing all he knew to impart a certain amount of warmth to the unconscious form at his side. Presently Ethne stirred.

"Oh, how cold it is," she murmured. "Where are we? Ah, I remember."

Derek's teeth were chattering. A long, hard, healthy walk and a piercing chill of dank mist and

night air supervening thereupon, would have that effect on both of them. Now he struck a match and looked at his watch. "A quarter to nine," he said to himself," and the whole night before us."

Just then Ethne sat up suddenly.

"Did you hear?" she asked quickly. "Wait—listen now."

"Why, what was it?" intensely, all eagerness.

"Listen, listen," she repeated.

Derek did listen, and in the result he set up a long, pealing shout. He listened again, they both listened again. It was answered far down beneath, and then —it seemed that pandemonium was raised on that dark, misty moorland, for Derek let off a volley of the most carrying, ear-splitting yells ever heard. His lungs were good and now he almost danced with joy. Whoever it was that was coming up they would not miss them through any deficiency in the faculty of hearing, and as he paused from sheer want of breath, there came up another distant but nearer shout.

"We're all right, Ethne," he exclaimed, jumping up deliriously, and sending another death-awakening whoop pealing through the darkness and mist with all the power of his strong young lungs. "They'll be very deaf if they don't find us now."

"Oh, I hope to heaven they will," she answered half pettishly, the nervy female strain beginning to come over her as the result of cold and the sudden awakening from sleep. "Keep it up. Shout again."

Derek did so with tremendous effect, and in the result ten minutes later a light—such a welcome light—in the shape of a powerful electric lamp

carried by Bastwick, together with two lesser lights; and two enormous black shadows, represented by Mathers and Chadburn, the under keeper, pierced the mist, and revealed the two lost ones.

"Now, then, Mathers, get out the contents of that bag of yours," said Bastwick with characteristic promptitude, at once diving into the contents of the said bag. "Now then, Ethne, put this down first." This was a measure from a brandy flask, and the girl obeyed. She did not like it, but she was in the habit of obeying Bastwick, and as usual when she obeyed him, she found it was for her own good, for the revivifying spirit warmed her thoroughly. Then from the bag was produced certain articles of food, which added to the revivifying effect.

"That's it. Now you feel all jolly," he went on. "Can you walk?"

"Oh yes, I can walk."

"That's all right. Come along then. It will keep you from getting more chilled too. I expect you are all right as concerns that now."

She obeyed again, and supporting her firmly, with his powerful electric lamp, Bastwick guided her down the homeward path.

It may or may not have been noticeable to the residue of the party that to the companion of her adventure Bastwick said no word. Derek noticed it, at any rate, as he seized upon some hurried and much needed refreshment, and did not like it. Ah, well, he supposed he was going to be made the scapegoat for the whole affair. However, they could talk it over in the morning, but he couldn't help it, anyhow, so what was the use of bothering?

The way home by the powerful light was plain sailing to the three who knew every inch of the moor by day or by night, even though the mist showed no signs of lightening, and Derek, his young and healthy system now fortified, began to feel disgusted. After all, he had done what he could, and it wasn't his fault if one of these beastly sudden moorland mists had sprung up and surrounded them. But his kinsman seemed to think it was, by his manner. He felt furious. He began to work himself up into a hard state of resentment quite akin to what he had felt on that former occasion, when he had declared his intention of never setting foot within Wood Bastwick again, and so the party reached that domicile rather late, even from a home-staying point of view. And still Bastwick said nothing to his nephew, except a monosyllabic word here and here as occasion required.

No alteration had been made in the movements of the Hiltons, and they had taken their departure on the day following the above adventure as originally arranged. Mrs. Hilton had offered to stay on a few days and help look after Ethne, who, as was only to be expected, had developed a feverish cold as the result of chill and exposure; and this suggestion Bastwick had put to the girl.

"Do just as you like about it, dear, one way or the other," he had said in his straight, out from the shoulder way. "It's entirely your own convenience you've got to consider, not mine."

She looked troubled.

"Dear Uncle Geoff," she answered, "you won't

mind, will you, but I believe I'd rather be left just alone with you."

And Bastwick had grinned sardonically and declared that in his opinion she had chosen the better part. Whereat his sister was offended and Derek disgusted on his own account. For Ethne had kept her bed, and he had not even the opportunity of bidding her good-bye. But, after all, it would give him a pretext for running his motor car over from time to time to inquire, and this was something.

But that sort of a cold does not run lightly, and Ethne was more or less invalided for a matter of three or four weeks, but she seemed to bear that unenviable state with the perfection of patience; her only complaint being that her kinsman must perforce be left so much to himself. He admitted that this was not a state of things that he exactly preferred, but it could not be helped.

"Then you would rather have your little Ethne with you than not?" she said one day, in that deep, soft voice of hers. "Well, that's something."

"Of course I would, darling. How could you suppose otherwise?" and she was content.

Her illness seemed somehow to draw them closer together, closer than they had ever been. Hers was not an exacting nature and she made a very easy invalid. Bastwick found abundance of time to sit with her and talk or read, and there were moments when she told herself, that if this were not the very happiest experience of her life, it must be something very near it.

The rectory girls, too, would come in and flood the room with their breezy, boisterous cheerfulness, and

this, too, she enjoyed. But the times spent with her relative alone were those which to her seemed everything. They had come together at last.

Then when she was able to get down and about in the balmy, premature springlike February air, he had suggested taking her away for a change, to the seaside, or even abroad if she preferred it.

But she assured him that she did not prefer it ; she was perfectly happy at home, and had not the slightest inclination to go abroad or anywhere else, and she was rewarded by a barely perceptible gleam of relief that came over his face. For she knew that he did not prefer it either.

Book II

CHAPTER I

BACK TO THE PRIMITIVE

HE was gazing out over the blue, glassy sea, his hands shading his eyes in the form of binoculars.

"What is it? Can you see anything?"

There was a quickness of anticipation in the clear, feminine voice, almost of hope, which somehow jarred upon the other.

"Tired of our island of Eden already, dear? Ah, well, it's only natural. Man—and woman—were not created for a solitude *à deux*; at any rate, not for ever and ever."

"It isn't that," and then she stopped. This hesitation jarred upon him yet further.

"Shall we hoist our signal again?" he went on.

"No-o. At least I don't know. Just as you think advisable."

The point of this lay in the fact that, having turned it over in his own mind, Kerchival had decided that to keep up a continual smoke, the advantages and the reverse might be divided into about equal proportion. It might attract the attention of a passing ship and it might not. On the other hand, it might

very conceivably attract the attention of those for whom it was not in the least meant. He had gathered from conversation with the captain and officers on board the *Bonito* prior to the catastrophe, that their island must be almost certainly one of an archipelago, many of whose other islands were inhabited or visited by savages of the most ferocious and cannibalistic type, and these he certainly did not wish to attract. As an alternative to this, years and years spent under present conditions would be preferable. So much for himself, but of late it had struck him that his companion was not quite of the same opinion.

Yet no one could have been more adaptable. She had never complained. She had been his right hand in every scheme set afoot to render their enforced captivity more and more tolerable, further, almost idyllic; and better than all, he had won her to love; glorious, free, radiant love. Up till now they had had been all in all to each other.

Now she came close up to him. They stood there side by side, two grand figures, each representing the ideally physical human in its respective sex. The life had made for the perfect development of each; had any eye happened to light upon them at that moment the verdict would have been, "What fine barbarian race do these two represent?" They were burned brown as to face and limbs, their improvised clothing even had been made with an eye to ease and coolness, and yet with a certain amount of original taste contributed about equally by both, but, we repeat, all making for ease.

Some months had gone by since their first meeting there on the beach by the wrecked stores, and the

departure of the Dago seamen with their only boat. And Kerchival, looking back, could not for the life of him declare they were the least happy months he had ever spent in his life. Indeed very much the reverse. He wanted for nothing, he told himself. He had shed all the artificial wants of artificial life; and here in the free, natural, untrammelled stage he found himself in such hard and healthy form as he never thought it possible for any human being to attain to; and in this he simply revelled. And she? It was long since she had even begun to assure him that nothing was wanting to render her enjoyment of life complete. And yet—and yet—with regard to her how long would such a state of blissful contentment last? Of late he had thought to detect ever so faint a wistfulness when she had talked over things and people of the past. Would this deepen and gradually widen into a gulf between them? Heaven forbid.

As regards the material side of their marooning, these two, it will be seen, had been exceptionally fortunate. The stores washed up from the wreck had been in sufficient quantity to last them as to provisions for quite a considerable time, while material of one kind and another had likewise been plentifully thrown up. In fact, out of some of the latter, supplemented with boughs and young saplings, Kerchival had succeeded in constructing a very serviceable shelter, for he was, as we heard his companion declare, a man of resource.

They had explored the island thoroughly again and again. Kerchival estimated its dimensions at about eight miles by six, but circumscribed as these dimensions were the steepness and ruggedness of the

forest-clad slopes made it seem four times the size. They had climbed the apex of the cone and looked down into the jagged clefts of the extinct crater and from there, indeed, had been able to take in the complete outline of the island. But of other land in sight, even in the clearest of weather, they had made out no sign. They had further discovered that the island contained nothing harmful in the way of quadrupeds, but it did contain a variety of snakes, both large and small, and unmistakably venomous, albeit of a species with which Kerchival was not acquainted. Likewise vast and hairy spiders with wicked nippers, dreadful looking beasts nearly the size of his hand. These, however, were not plentiful.

Of course the first attention after food had been turned to the matter of armament, and Kerchival had found no difficulty in manufacturing a number of quite serviceable bows and arrows. The arrows he tipped with sharp heads cut from the provision tins and wound round the wooden points, and very serviceable they were, too. They were no mere toys, but at a pinch might serve for really efficient weapons of defence. Meanwhile they were most effective in the procuring of fresh food, for he could bring down the large speckled green pigeons with scarcely a miss. It was not long before his companion came very near him at this kind of practice. This afforded sport, amusement, as well as providing; and, lo! there was no fear of a failing larder. From the tree fibres from which he improvised his bow-strings, Kerchival likewise improvised most effective fishing-lines, and here again came in a variety of sport and a variety of provisions.

"Well, which is the best fun—this or golf or tennis?" he said one day, when they were out in the forest together, and she had brought down a couple of pigeons at rather a good height. The big fat birds fell with a bump at her feet. Her sun-browned cheeks took on a richer colour and the clear eyes lit up with the triumph of success, for she had performed quite a fine feat in real archery, and the savage which underlurks every woman was coming out in this one more and more.

"Which is more fun? Why, this of course. Now I can understand why you people are so keen on shooting."

"Ha, ha! Even with a couple of bits of wood and a string across one of them," he answered with a laugh. "Never mind, the principle's the same, and our Norman forefathers got exactly the same amount of fun, if not a great deal more, with the same implement."

"Why, of course they did, but I sometimes wish there was something larger, more worthy of one's steel, or bits of wood rather, to practise at."

"Oh, do you? Well, under the circumstances I hope there never will be," he answered meaningly.

This was a side which had often of late pressed itself upon Kerchival. What if one fine day their island were invaded? What chance would they stand? Very little. Why such a visitation might take place at night while they were fast asleep, but as a set off against that as a side of it, he remembered the shrinking on the part of all savages from aggressive action in the dark. He had likewise manufactured another fairly efficient type of weapon, in the

shape of a club, which consisted of a large, oval stone inserted into a half split staff and strongly bound together with tree fibre—a reversion to the stone age, he declared with a laugh.

Not only with the implements of war and the chase did he concern himself, he even set to work to devise some of the appliances of a refined civilization. For instance, it was not difficult to fashion a rude comb out of a flat slab of hard wood. Brushes were not so easy, but here again a certain tough kind of tree fibre was pressed into service, and after many failures some semblance of a pair of brushes was the result. Other unconsidered trifles, too, owed their being to his ingenuity, but one thing had up to now baffled even his resourcefulness and that was the manufacture of paper and ink. For lack of this, however, they had been keeping a carved diary on various tree trunks, and these to a stranger suddenly happening upon them, would have looked bizarre indeed.

Now it seemed that her aspiration was likely to be gratified. They were pushing their way through thick but not high undergrowth, and over this, all of a sudden, came a tumble of rustling commotion, and with a strident appalling hiss a great sinuous length of black neck shot up.

The woman made one step back and drew the arrow to her ear. Her poise was magnificent, even then her companion could not help noticing this. She let go. Straight through the black grisly head the arrow went, embedded to the shaft. The coil sank out of sight and only a prodigious flogging of the ground and brushwood showed where the great serpent was writhing in its death agonies.

"That was perfectly splendid," ejaculated Kerchival. "Oh, it was magnificent." He stood looking at her, a glow of admiring light in his own eyes. Hers were luminous. "Well, you've found something worthy of your steel after all," dropping an arm on the breadth of her splendid shoulders. "Now come and look, only be careful; we might get an ugly whack with the beast's tail."

"Isn't it dead then?" she asked quickly.

"Dead? Yes, dead and kicking, not alive and kicking," he added with a laugh.

They had not far to go. Her skilful shot had taken effect at barely a dozen yards. About twenty feet of thick bronze coil was twisting and writhing. Kerchival had some difficulty in withdrawing the arrow, which he was not going to waste.

"What a horror!" declared his companion, her exultation dashed with repulsion as she looked down upon her handiwork. "Would it have come for us?"

"I daresay, unless we had made ourselves scarce mighty quick, but it isn't one of the venomous kind, it's the squashing kind. Once let it get you within the grip of those coils and then, equally, good-night."

It would have been strange to see these two returning down the forest path in the glow of the evening, laden with their spoils; these of course not including the large serpent. With their primitive weapons and nondescript costume and the dark green and brown of the forest setting they might have been figures culled from some romantic pageant. Putting this aside, however, they might have been returning with an English shooting party. Both were

cheerful, elate; they were exchanging lively talk respecting things past, present and to come, and they were wending their way homeward, and this in a small, solitary, sea-girt island whose scarred volcanic cone towered heavenwards to redden its grey, and for long past, fireless, rocks in the far flame of the sinking sun. Man and woman fast reverting to the primitive.

The shelter which they had built stood just on the edge of the forest rim on the head of the cliff, the original cave now doing duty as a storehouse. Immediately beneath, the runnel of fresh water from above gushed down. The sight of this, too, had more than once been the means of raising in Kerchival's mind a modicum of anxiety. Strange as it may seem this runnel, usually leaping full and gaily from rock to rock, from one fern-fringed basin to another, was the only fresh water on the whole island. No wonder he regarded it with solicitude, the more so that of late he had noticed that the volume of its water had undergone marked abatement. Ah, well, he supposed that it was the dry part of the season. A thunderstorm or two, and a tropical shower would soon remedy that. All the same the prospect of this stream drying up was not one to be regarded with equanimity. But of these misgivings he said nothing to his companion.

"Here we are, at 'home, sweet home,'" he cried gaily, as they gained their shelter, a sort of châlet-like hut divided into two, and there was a deeper undernote than mere gaiety in his tone. "We are leading the simple life and no mistake, but oh, good heavens, how I do yearn for a hundredweight of tobacco. Now

Alice Brand, come and help your ' own Richard.' We don't want any ' leaves to spread our lowly bed or stakes to fence our cave,' because in the first purpose Providence has sent us up enough rugs and other covering from the wreck, and for the next there's nothing here to keep out, and we have forsworn the cave as a sleeping-compartment."

She laughed gaily and stirred up the smouldering embers of the fire which burned in the open.

Kerchival had once learnt the art of making a fire with two sticks and a heap of dry punk, and since they had been on the island he practised it until he had become sufficiently proficient to produce a flame within four minutes. Until he had become thus proficient, they had kept a continuous fire burning; sometimes did so now to save trouble.

After the evening meal both seemed to relapse into a state of usual drowsiness; the primitive life, you see; all day in the open and abundant exercise; both in the hardest of open air form; and here was the result. One retired with a sleepy, laughing good-night to her couch within the shelter, the other was about to do so, when something struck upon his extra sharpened sense of perception which started him wide awake, and he knew within the next few moments that something was going to happen or —was not.

CHAPTER II

A TEMPTATION

THE moon had risen.

It is astonishing how you can grasp a sound when you can see it in process of manufacture; for instance, take the case of some one hammering a long way off. If you could not see it you would not hear it, seeing it you do. Again, two or more people talking, you see them from an upper window passing on the other side of the street; you can hear them, whereas if you were sitting at your table writing—say piffle—for the amusement of other people—you couldn't hear them at all. All of which for present purposes may be taken to mean that Kerchival going to the cliff's brink, for as we have said the moon had risen, heard what he heard partly because he saw.

To begin with what he saw. A curiously unwonted cloud was spreading over the skyline; a black cloud, of no great dimensions and of elongated shape. He had not seen that phenomenon for many months. To continue with what he heard, so faint, so far away, that even in that still night to no ear but the practised ear of a savage or to that of one who had attained to the condition of semi-savagery could any sound have carried at all, and this sound coming upon

the stiilness of the moon-silvered night, was that of a faint, far away throbbing. Kerchival knew it. The smoke was the smoke, and the throb was the throb of the propeller, of a distant passing steamship. Yes, there it was, away out over the liquid plain. There was no sort of mistaking it. Here was rescue at last.

It happened that they had built with dry wood and other material a very large beacon, ready to fire in view of any such contingencies. Now the watcher's first instinct was to leap up and race for this pile and apply a light to the same, but his second instinct arrested the impulse. He paused and listened. Nearer and nearer the sound of the propeller came. Here was rescue, sure and certain. He had only to touch the large pyramid of drywood and the sudden gush of red flame up into the night sky would arrest the attention of anybody navigating those lonely seas. Yet he paused.

The thing was marvellous, in all probability unique of its kind. Years and years of this imprisonment, dead to the outside world, lay before him, lay before both of them, and here was a way out, yet he hesitated to take it.

The throb of the propeller sounded nearer and nearer. The black trail of smoke showed more distinctly over the far glittering moon path. And then it was borne upon his mind with irresistible force that the last thing in the world he desired was rescue.

He rose quickly and entered the shelter where his companion was sleeping. The moon ray from the open end flooded the interior. She lay there, her face pillowed on one large symmetrical arm, calm,

beautiful, in sleep. He gazed down upon her for some moments with a great intensity. She did not stir. The while he was turning over in his mind the situation from both sides. Perhaps had she wakened up then, it might have meant the turning of the scale, but she did not. She lay in her calm, sensuous beauty, and this was enough.

Kerchival went out again. The throbbing sound away over the moonlit sea seemed to grow fainter and fainter, ever such a trifle fainter, even yet by no means so much so but that had he fired the beacon they would not both have been off the island in less than an hour. But still he did not fire it. Why should he, he asked himself? The glorious happiness of a lifetime had come to him here, a happiness beside which nothing which he could recall was anything but poor. Quick in a succession of flashes there ran through his mind the story of their life here; here together, the world shut out, the two of them all in all to each other, their healthy congenial pursuits in this generous abode of Nature. They king and queen of a land without subjects. No—with one subject, and that love. He thought of the sordid world and the trammelled conditions thereof, in this case trammelled, more than trammelled; and here was ideality. In less than an hour, did he but fire that pile, they would enter on the first stage of such conditions. No, no—a thousand times no. He would not do it.

Then came a final struggle. Ought he not to do it on her account, ought he not to consider her? An ugly black vein supervened on this thought. Had he ever known good to ensue on considering

anybody? Had any one ever considered him? Not one. Why should he now start on that futile form of softness, the consideration of other people? He would not. Consideration of self was, in the long run, the best way of considering others, so his experience had told him.

Now the distant throb had become faint indeed. The black cloud of smoke had almost dispelled over the moonlit liquid plain. Then both died down to silence, invisibility. He felt as if a weight had been lifted. He had been given a choice and he had chosen. Now that the choice had been taken away did he regret it? Not one atom; and yet—and yet—there had been a struggle. Now that it was all over and the issue irrevocably decided. Kerchival was surprised to find that great beads of perspiration were standing out on his forehead; for strong emotions affect us in varying ways. He had gone through a struggle, as we have said, and he had won—but had won, as he told himself, in his own interests.

Sitting there on the cliff brow, beneath the myriads of stars, his mind conjured up a contrast. By that time, or by nearly that time, they would be on board some sort of ship, the cynosure of a gaping crowd of nondescript people—immured in stuffy cabins; in short, back in the world and its conventionalities. The bare idea at the present moment was hideous. He turned back with a feeling of absolute relief, largely added to by a feeling of thankfulness that the sleeper had not awakened. If she had? Well, he wondered what her verdict would have been in the matter, or to be accurate he hardly did wonder.

Well, never mind, they would wake up in the morning to resume their idealistic life in the free air of heaven, under the blue of the sky; the glories of Nature by sea and land outspread around them, all in all to each other as they had become.

With the balmy dawn pearling up over the heave of the glassy sea swell, Kerchival absolutely rejoiced over the decision he had arrived at. She came out to him, fresh, delightful, for another day, for many days. There was no question of thinking how long this was to last, of counting weeks or days before they would have to part. Here they were together —all in all for time or eternity.

"Oh, I had such a strange dream, darling," she began, throwing her arms over his shoulders. "I thought we had been taken off and were on our way back to England again; on board a horrid, smoky, grimy tramp steamer, and the sense of relief when I woke——"

"Sense of relief?" he supplied sharply. "But why sense of relief, Leland?" passing an arm around her. "Now tell me, honestly, candidly, don't you ever feel a longing or some sort of a longing to get back to your people, or at any rate to that one you were telling me about."

Her great eyes met his, full, straight; and there was no droop in them.

"I may have once," she said softly, "but—not now."

"Why not now?"

"Because I have—you."

"Oh, you have me? Te' me, when we were on

board would the same idea have struck you. Eh?"

"Now there's that sharp probing way of yours," she answered softly. "Well, if you will have it, I believe it would."

"Do you? Well now, supposing you had an opportunity at this moment," and he purposely glanced out seaward, "of getting right away from here and returning to everybody or rather, to one, how would that come in?"

"No—no—no. It wouldn't come in at all"; and she drew his head down and kissed him long and passionately.

He looked at her with a strange expression. That temptation which had come upon him and which it seemed he had spent hours in struggling with. He wondered what she would say if he were to tell her that he had deliberately neglected, allowed to go by, a means of rescue from their position. Would she have been so very sure of herself had she known? Then an access of philosophy to which he was sometimes prone came to his aid. What was the use of discounting potentialities? The present sufficed. A wave of passion swept over the man.

"Leland, my darling one, you are looking lovely; a very queen of the morning," he said, clasping her to him. "And the whole realm of Nature is ours."

"Yes, it is, it is," she answered, smiling up at him. "But do you know—when I woke from that dream it was quite a relief to find that it was not true."

"Quite a relief? Are you sure again?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"Yes, yes, and think again. Now, for instance, I'll

draw a picture. Think of that jolly place you were telling me about, what's it ? Wood Bastwick, stuck in among those jolly grouse moors, and that relative of yours, who seems to be rather an out-of-the-way sort of chap from your account. You don't yearn for another look in there, eh ? Supposing I saw now a craft passing far out at sea, and had only to go and light the beacon, the signal to take both of us off, what would you say ? Should I light it or shouldn't I ? "

She hesitated for half a moment, then looked up at him.

" What I should say is leave it alone, I would rather be—as we are."

Looking down into her face, into her great expressive eyes, he believed her. We don't.

Believing her he felt reassured to a certain extent yet with an uncomfortable sort of reservation. Here, all in all to each other, was one thing. Once back again in the stir of the world was another. Kerchival was not particularly well supplied with this world's goods, he could not give her much for instance, and all his experience leaped up to remind him that she was the sort who would probably want much. He had heard enough from her about that relative to whom she was going and who could give her, comparatively speaking, much, and this had always been rather a black drop in the otherwise clear philtre. Once they were taken off their island home where would he be ? Well, where ? And with this thought that of his temptation of the night before stood out clear—simplified. He had done the best for himself, for himself ;

and that summed up the world's limit of true philosophy which may be defined as justifiable selfishness.

More than ever was he confirmed in this judgment as now he watched this splendid specimen of feminine humanity, as leaving him for a moment she walked to the cliff brow and looked over. The magnificent poise, the free movement of the limbs, the glow of glorious health in the clear, straight-glancing eyes, set in their golden sunburn. And all this for the present was his—for the present. Yet had he yielded to the first natural impulse and thrown out the signal to the passing steamship it would no longer have been. By this time even it would no longer have been. That was enough. He rejoiced that he had quelled that first impulse, one of the lingering impulses of civilization. He rejoiced abundantly. The primitive reversion plus the refinement of civilization aforesaid seemed to constitute the ideal.

He followed her to where she stood upon the cliff brow looking out to sea.

"Are you looking for the possible means of deliverance? Well, there's none. I was only putting a case to you."

She turned to him.

"But I told you I did not want any means of deliverance. Here are you and here am I. What more?"

The flame of the sun deluged the blue liquid plain, turning the little white wave tips into sparkling silver. The glad sea breeze seemed to leap rejoicing round the world, with an ecstatic freedom. A

solitude which would have been dreadful, horrific to one, was paradise to two. An island prison which would have been a prison to one, was an island of Eden to two.

CHAPTER III

THE BOAT

LELAND GORING was one of those feminine types for whom the present suffices. When, stranded and alone in a strange land, she had looked back upon her experiences there, a great longing had come over her to take up the old thread of things where she had left it. She had more than begun to realize that her experiences there had been flat and unprofitable. More than once her considerable powers of attraction had afforded opportunity for doing extremely well for herself from a worldly point of view, but somehow she had let such go by. She could not flog up sufficient reciprocity, she told herself, and, sometimes, the other party to the proposed alliance. And while at the lowest depths of this vein she had penned a letter which we have seen, to her distant relative and former *fiancé*.

She had felt doubtful as to the nature of its reception, which is not surprising, for, as we have seen, so did its recipient. She had learned a good deal in eight years, among other things that all men are not soft-headed fools, and that there were women in the world every whit as attractive as Leland Goring. All this had been very much upon her during the first few days of the homeward passage. There were

times when she doubted the nature of her welcome or whether she would meet with any welcome at all, and then, what would she do ? She would be nearly as much alone in her native land as in the far-off one she had just left.

Her fellow-passengers were few and of an uninteresting type, as we think we have remarked. All save one, and that one was Arnold Kerchival.

Not all at once did she discover this, but a week or two of the close intercourse of board ship life is a wonderful spectrum, and the two, having gravitated towards each other from among the herd by a sort of natural process of selection, were not slow to see into each other. Likewise by a natural process of selection, the two were left in the kind of isolation they desired—a grudging one on the part of some of the said herd, and that of either sex respectively. Followed that such daily and hourly intercourse grew warm. Leland Goring ceased to look forward to the end of the voyage with apprehension or with pleasure. She found the present sufficing—more and more sufficing—for the present. Then had come the catastrophe.

The hideous howling world doomed to destruction in the black hours ; the fact that they two alone had not yet gone below, being the sole reason of their lives being saved. Then had come that dreadful struggle in the mountainous wave, when she had been torn from his strong grasp, and hurled she knew not where.

Up till then nothing definite had passed between those two. The *Bonito* was not a first-class, up-to-date liner by any means ; although certificated to

carry passengers she was not many degrees removed from a tramp. Her captain and officers, although efficient seamen and very worthy men, were not drawn exactly from the class with which Leland Goring could have much in common, and of the residue of the passengers we have already spoken; followed then that she and Kerchival had all unconsciously set up a little world of their own. It was afterwards when thrown together upon their own resources in this entirely new world of an entirely different nature, that the mutual draw, which had been narrowing in on the decks of the *Bonito*, should culminate—as we have seen.

Yet although this woman had been so firm and unfaltering in her assurances that she had no desire to return to the outside world, there were times when in her heart of hearts she had qualms. Would this life be such an all-sufficing one when years, or—perish the thought—even more months, had gone by. She was old enough to know that the "world well lost" chestnut is apt to prove a very fallacious one—in fact, only fit for the common or schoolroom copy book—and yet had she not just assured her companion in reclusion to the very contrary, and that most emphatically.

She looked out on the dancing radiance of the blue sea. A great white albatross hung on strong, outstretched pinions plunging ever and anon with a raucous war whoop into a cloud of smaller seabirds to rob them of fish which he had been too indolent to capture for himself. These scattered with shrill screams of anger and disgust. A shower of silver stars as a school of flying fish skimmed the surface,

and a dark, triangular, moving object gliding noiselessly but rapidly, showed where the arch depredator of all was on the stealthy watch ; and this was to be the limit of her world, of their world—it might be for the rest of their lives—and that through her own choice. She did not at that moment know how literally it had been the deliberate and material choice of another, but a dozen hours ago. And this sea boundary simply spelt prey—predatoriness. The whole of Nature moved by one all absorbing object, the search for and pursuit of food ; and they themselves, the highest order of being, were here reduced to exactly the same level.

Yet not entirely, for these two, although they had no books or writing materials, had made a compact that they would not let their intellect become atrophied any more than could be helped, and two educated people of average intelligence and ability would naturally have a good deal to draw from in the shape of what they had read and heard, apart from their experiences or anecdotes. They would recite what they could remember of grave or gay, or find amusement in filling in the gaps they could not remember with improvised matter invented on the spot. This was wholly amusing, and we can recommend it to the use of any two or more persons similarly situated or snowed up in a train for instance, or weather-bound on the wrong side of a drift of a flooded river, or in short, in any other predicament in which the thoroughly wholesome maxim is to keep jolly.

Well, our castaways had employed this form of diversion and others, with adequate effect, and when

not employed in some form of work—under even those primitive circumstances there was plenty to be done towards ensuring the comfort of life—or out in pursuit of such wild creatures as were required for food purposes, they never had occasion to yawn in each other's faces.

Leland had been sleeping late, and she had been dreaming. The green, sun-flooded island in its radiant setting of blue sea, had given way to another scene, that of a gloomy mist-swept moor, and parting the mist the air current from a jagged black fissure wafted upwards. It was not night but yet half dark, and dreary and depressing to the last degree. The place seemed familiar to her and yet not. And now, on the brink of this fissure, stood a girl, a golden-haired girl, and her back was towards the sleeper. Leland stirred uneasily. A murderous impulse came upon her to rush forward and push the figure over the brink. She could hardly contain herself, yet she seemed to be standing watching as if something further was going to happen. Then that impulse came upon her stronger again ; she was about to hurl herself forward when a faint, far away sound arrested her—the tolling of a bell coming upwards through the dank, drear mist. Ah ! now she knew. This gap or fissure was Cronshaw's Leap. She stared hard again, but the figure had disappeared. She was standing on the familiar spot alone.

A faint shout now reached her ears. She turned, puzzled, and—the dream had faded, was utterly gone ; yet not, for it had left an impression, an impression of sadness such as she had not known, at any

rate, since the dawn of the life on the island. But the shout was repeated this time not faintly, and now she was awake again.

The shout took the shape of her own name, and it came from the beach below. She answered quickly, rising up.

"Leland, come down quick. Here's something, or I'm mistaken."

Kerchival was standing on the beach. His stentorian tones soon brought down his companion.

"What is it?" she asked eagerly, following his glance seaward, whence now a dark object, awash in the wavelets stirred up by the morning breeze, was slowly but certainly coming ashore.

"It's my impression," he answered, "it's a boat, our boat. Yes, it is, or at any rate a boat," as the upturned keel covered by barnacles, was now quite close. Unable to control his impatience Kerchival rushed out into the water, regardless of shark peril, to haul in the derelict. This he soon accomplished. "Of course," he said. "It's our boat right enough, but what a marvellous thing that it should come back like this! What of the cut-throats who took it away. Just look at it, Leland. Months ago they stole it, now what on earth can have happened since? Either they were picked up, which isn't likely, or they went mad with thirst and threw themselves into the sea, or they may have knifed each other in a certain stage of the said madness."

Anyhow there lay the tiny derelict, barnacles and slimy green sea moss growing from its sides. But

that it should have returned to exactly the spot whence it had been taken away—therein lay the marvel.

"The law of currents is very intricate," he began, "and obviously it is a circular one that has brought this round here months afterwards. Well, our morning's work is to clean all this refuse off her. Then we will be able to launch out merrily into the deep to do our fishing instead of sitting on a rock. Besides it will be rather fun to explore the coast line from the sea."

Leland's face was radiant.

"Won't it?" she said. "I shall enjoy a row for a change."

With all his ingenuity, Kerchival had not yet succeeded in fashioning a canoe. He had made several attempts, but they had all proved failures, and now here was their own boat miraculously restored to them. Gazing at it the radiance faded from Leland's face.

"I wonder, if this thing could talk," she said, "what sort of tale it would have to tell. Those two dreadful creatures perhaps sitting opposite each other when their food and water was exhausted, glowering at each other in the extremity of their awful madness, and then the death struggle which capsized the boat and threw them into the sea as food for sharks. No, I don't seem so keen on using it as I did at first."

"Oh, bosh! All that's sheer imagination, after all. Nothing of the sort may have happened, and they may have been comfortably picked up by some passing craft. At any rate, we'll chance it, and

having cleaned it the first thing I must do is to knock up another pair of paddles."

This find proved to them very much of a godsend, and now they began to put out to sea, and enjoy the clear, cool evenings while skirting the coast or fishing. But at any rate it made a change.

"Upon my word," he now said, "it's perfectly marvellous. Here we have all the essentials of life put ready to our hand, and then even the boat is sent back to us; and still there are people who say there's no such thing as luck."

She laughed, happily, as she went on with her work. Several pieces of iron had come ashore clamped on to fragments of the wreckage, and out of these Kerchival had fashioned rude implements. Such came in handy now, and in about an hour the keel and sides of the boat were clean.

"She'll float like a duck after all that soaking," he pronounced, surveying their handiwork with pride. "Now we'll spend the rest of the day making another pair of paddles and then we'll pull out and see if we can find anything of the wreck."

In this sort of fashion the days went by. They were always doing something. And the surprising part of it was that time never seemed to hang.

But somehow from that strange dream there seemed to date a subtle indefinable change which had come into Leland's thoughts. If it tinged her ideas or her manner ever so faintly, her companion, if he noticed it, made no sign.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHANGE

IT is a truism in theology, and one borne out by all mundane experience, that no one is intended to be completely happy in this world, or at any rate not for long. These two castaways had had rather more than their share of such happiness, hence the change.

The sun rose with an extraordinary yellow effect, such an effect as they had never seen attending sunrise before, added to which the air was unaccountably still; hot and murky and oppressive for so early an hour. It seemed that there was a curious sound in the air, still as this was; a strange, faint moan in the water; and this too, except for the faint heave of the normal swell, was still and glassy. It seemed to affect the spirits of the two.

Higher and higher rose the sun amid the same yellow, murky haze, and, although not a cloud was in the sky, the surface of the sea looked dead and leaden.

"I wonder what this is going to mean," said Kerchival. "Another tornado, I suppose."

Leland shivered.

"Don't suggest such a dreadful thing," she answered almost pettishly. "Perhaps it's another

tornado like that one that took the roof off our house like the lid off a paper box."

"Oh, not necessarily," he reassured her. "Besides this roof is about twice as strong as the other was, and if it goes we can still rig up another."

The experience to which she referred had been a very disagreeable and startling one indeed, and it had supervened upon such a day as that which was now opening. It had broken in the night, had come on with a roar and a rush amid terrific and unceasing peals of thunder, and vivid lightning flashes until the whole world seemed wrapped in sheeting flame. It had lashed up a raging sea, the leap of whose tremendous waves had all but reached to the height of their store cavern, and had wrought the damage above specified. It had terrified Leland, strong-nerved woman as she was, to a stage of a breakdown; and even her companion, the dominant male, had found in such a convulsion of Nature something that was very nerve shaking.

The effect of this new and oppressive and phenomenally unwonted stillness of the elements was not a little curious as regarded Leland. It seemed to change her nature somehow. Now she began for the first time to wish they were out of it, and said so. Kerchival did not quite know what to make of it, or of her. All the contentment of love which she had been pouring forth, now struck him as unreal, in a few of the words which she was now letting forth. He was dismayed. Had he been living in a fool's paradise all this time after all? He hardly recognized her in this vein. He recognized partly that climatic effects may have been answerable for the

change. He recognized even this, that such effects may have been telling upon him, too.

"I think you'd better lie down a bit, dear," he urged. "You don't seem quite yourself, and you were very restless last night, perhaps owing to this change. If anything happens in the shape of change of weather, well, I'm always here, but I don't think it will, at any rate not till night, even if then. You lie down and take it easy. I'll take out the bow for half an hour. I shall always be within hail. You have only got to blow the whistle and I shall hear you."

Among other articles which the speaker had manufactured with an eye to practical use and that by no means the most difficult of the many which he had, were two whistles, cut from a sort of bamboo cane which grew plentifully enough, and each of them carried one of these.

"Well, I think I will," she said. "Fact is, I feel as if I wanted to go to sleep for the rest of my natural life. But—don't go far, will you?"

He saw her comfortably settled, and then thought he might as well start off and kill something, for the larder was getting rather low. Upon him the atmospheric conditions had had a diverse effect to that which they had had upon her. Under them he felt restless, certainly incapable of lying down or going to sleep; so taking a bow and a sufficiency of arrows, he was ready to sally forth. He paused to look at her. She was already asleep, fast asleep, lying in an easy *abandon* of sensuous grace, one large bare arm pillowing her head. He bent down and kissed her, long and full on the lips. For the first time a wave of regretful tenderness surged through

his heart, because for the first time it seemed that the innermost workings of her mind had been laid bare, that she had been harbouring these feelings of discontent, of a longing to break away, when all the while she had been professing the reverse.

As he struck upwards through the green gloom of the forest he could not help drawing an absurd contrast, and the absurdity of it was this. He, Arnold Kerchival, going out shooting with a bow and arrows, as he might have done in his very junior school days, and thought himself lucky if he brought down two or three blackbirds or thrushes. He worked out the contrast between this and himself going out shooting with a hundred and twenty guinea pair of guns and attended by a loader; and the sense of absurdity became more rampant than ever. Another contrast lay in the fact, that now here to-day, there seemed to be absolutely nothing to shoot. A hot, boding stillness seemed to be upon the forest. No bird voices of any kind arose among its depths. Had this weird, oppressive, unwonted stillness of Nature affected animal life too? It seemed so.

Well, they were not exactly starving, so his thoughts soon turned from the chase, and took on another bent, not an improvement, perhaps, for they turned upon Leland's new attitude. What if another chance offered even as that one which he had suffered to go by—would he take it? What if he had no alternative; for instance, if it should befall in broad daylight when she was awake and with him? Would *she* take it? All his perception told him now that she would.

And then? His mind ran back bitterly to his own circumstances. He was a poor man comparatively, with no prospects. His life had been spent mainly in ups and downs, in more than one queer corner of the world. He had made money more than once, never very much, and had lost it, more than once; and now he had lost it, and the largest drop of bitterness distilling within his thoughts was that once back in the outside world Leland would undergo a change.

Something of the circumstances under which she was going home she had imparted to him, as she was bound to have done, in the course of their everyday and mutual reclusion. Under these where would he come in? No, he would rather face life for the remainder of his days here with her, and the world apart. He had found his mate and so had rejoiced in the state of primitive savagery to which accident had reduced them.

Hitherto love had been roseate, the rose without the thorn, now it seemed that in her uncalculated, almost incoherent, sayings the thorn had peeped out and scratched, and it bled—bled.

Thus ruminating he had made his way a great deal further than he had any idea of. He was so hardened and strong-limbed that he took the rugged, now slippery, now uphill, way, as easily as most people would have stridden along a level road. The forest here ended, and he found he was up among the tumbled rocky boulders which lay around the base of the cone. He climbed even further; the whole island was visible around and beneath him now; their island, their realm. He took in the whole of

it in its pear-shaped *contour*, the hollows, the tumbling masses of forest wildering down to the low cliffs which overhung the sea. Their island! Their realm!

He had come further than he had intended, we have said, but in that clear atmosphere the sound of Leland's whistle could easily have reached him, yet what necessity could there be for such signal?

Now the crater of the extinct volcano lay in front of him. He climbed to the brim, and looked down into the various fissures and chasms within its hollow; for the crater of a volcano is not a perpendicular round pipe like a glacier "mill." He looked out seaward. It was near midday now, and the curious lurid enshrouding which had been over the sun and had followed its course up into the high heavens, had seemed to have undergone an abatement. Things looked more normal.

He had never actually been down into the crater. Often the two of them had made their way up here, had sat for hours, rather rejoicing in the thought that they were monarchs of all they surveyed. More than once, too, he had suggested exploring the crater, but from this Leland had dissuaded him, and that rather emphatically.

"It looks dangerous," she had said. "Leave it alone"; and he had left it alone. Now, however, as he sat there, something caught his eye, something below in the crater. He shaded his eyes with his hand—as his wont was when taking view of distant objects; it had a certain focussing effect he held, which greatly aided his naturally strong, keen glance. The object which now met that glance would certainly

have escaped the glance of nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand, but Kerchival, among his many other ups and downs, had been a diamond digger, and what he saw now brought back that phase of his existence, brought it back with a rush. It was only something blue and dull looking, showing out in the midst of the stones and lava on the rim of one of the small crevasses.

Somehow the object fired him. As every digger knows, "stones" are the product of "pipes," and what on earth was the vent of a volcano but a "pipe.' All the instincts of the old digger fired Kerchival's blood now. If this was as he conjectured, why how strangely it came in upon the thoughts on which he had been dwelling all the way up here, to the effect that if he were restored to the outside world he would be so restored as to be practically a pauper.

He gazed and gazed again. He would have given anything for a good binocular. That he was sure would have settled the matter beyond a doubt.

Now what he saw was perhaps a matter of half a hundred feet below. The stones and rubble overgrown with a fringe of sparse herbage led easily down to the spot. At any rate he would go down and investigate. There could be no harm in that.

His blood thrilled now with the glow of adventure, which had been long absent; for life, at any rate, though made up of makeshift, had been lacking in adventure. If it were as he thought, why then perhaps he would come round to Leland's idea, and think that the world might not be so well lost after all. If he could go back to the said world a rich man, or at any rate a prospective rich man, and share it

with her! To this end he began to let himself down over the rim of the crater. At first it seemed easy going, but as he got further down it became less so. There seemed to be but a thin layer of stones or rubble on the hard, slippery surface of the sloping lava, and more than once he lost his footing. Ah, why did not Leland's repeated warnings come back to him now, when he had suggested exploring the crater; his own instincts even. But no; the stronger instinct, the instinct which triumphs over peril or hardship, had reasserted itself. The instinct of the treasure seeker, the gambler with Nature, than which we can imagine no form of gambling more entirely alluring, now seized him in thrall. He seemed to forget everything almost, even the one whom he had left but a short while ago, with no more idea of this new development than he had of being crowned king of the world. He looked up. The jagged ridges of the crater seemed to wall him in with a hungry, malevolent frown. The sky above was brassy, and that terrible boding atmospheric lour had come overcast again. He streamed with perspiration from every pore, yet those dull blue, rough-looking stones which he had seen from above lay there below, beckoning him on. His hands began to clutch with the true gambler's grasp. Heavens! What if it were as he thought?

Now it became necessary to tread warily, for the very dislodgement of the stones and rubble might at any moment send these out of sight into the depths. To this end he took a diagonal course, tacking so as to come round to his objective without fear of dislodging it. Once he slipped and shot down a dozen feet over the smooth lava surface. He

recovered himself and lay panting, more with excitement than exertion. Now he wormed himself further along. He was on the very lip of the chasm. It was not a wide chasm, one which he could easily have cleared at a bound, but still it might be of depth unknown.

And now Kerchival began to realize that he had got into a very tight place indeed. It is a truism to all mountain climbers, contrary to the ancient and classical saw, that where climbing up is comparatively easy, climbing down is a very different thing. Here it was the other way about. In the one thought, he gave it then, he decided that his uphill return, on that slippery lava surface, would be the more difficult of the two, but at any rate here were those blue-looking, rough stones almost within reach of his hand, then quite within reach. He put forth his hand, now more than ever athrill with the joy of possession.

Then Arnold Kerchival fell—fell into depth and darkness.

CHAPTER V

FROM THE DEPTH

IT was well into the afternoon when Leland awoke, and she felt frightened.

Yes, frightened, but frightened of what? That was just it. Had she been able to put an answer to this question, she would have felt less frightened.

Rising she went out of the shelter and looked around. That unnatural haze still obscured the heavens. It was as though she were looking at the sun through smoked glass, and yet it was not an eclipse. There was no cloud to presage thunder, but yet the oppressiveness of the air was more still and boding than ever. Now, too, the moan of the sea on beach and reef had taken a louder, weirder tone. She went to the cliff brow and looked forth. She was more than wet with perspiration, so great was the heat. Heavens, it was awful, and all of a sudden too and for no apparent reason.

She felt frightened. Of Kerchival there was no sign. She put her whistle to her lips and blew three long, piercing calls.

No answer.

She listened long and tensely, not caring to realize that the pulsation of her heart had increased to a perceptible extent. Again she blew her triple call.

The strident echoes wailed back from the crags high up on the volcanic cone, but—no answering sound, and then apart from her apprehension of the unknown in the elements, a deadly fear crept into Leland's heart. Could anything have happened to him? And yet—what could have. There were no formidable animals upon the island. But what about snakes? True these were not plentiful, but one might at any moment happen upon one of the larger species, even as the specimen which he saw her so deftly slay with her own bow. What if he had fallen in with such and been struck suddenly and unawares, or crushed in the resistless coils? Even now she pictured him lying somewhere, up in the heart of the forest, dead and crushed beyond all recognition.

Now her imagination simply ran riot with her. She went to the edge of the forest and frantically blew off call after call on her whistle, adding her voice to the strident din. All to no purpose, there was no answer.

And now it occurred to Leland that the last thing she must do was to lose her head, and she had sufficient sense and self-control to realize that this was the very thing she was in process of doing. She had been left alone before, under similar circumstances, but never for so long at a time; it might be that the unwonted atmospheric conditions were having their effect upon her, but at any rate, she could not sit still idly waiting. She must be doing —doing.

To this end she returned to the shelter, and even while doing so, again her imagination began more than to run riot. Apart from the awful sense of loss

she pictured herself alone, in a ghastly solitude, and then she laughed bitterly; in a weaker woman one might have said hysterically; for she told herself that such should never be. The highest point of the cliffs would afford ample height for a swift and easy act of extinction.

Well, since he had not returned to her, she must go to him; in other words, go in search of him. But she had not the least idea, to begin with, what direction he had taken. The island was small certainly, but then it contained deep ravines, and well-nigh impenetrable nullahs, so thickly overgrown as to be shut off from the light of day. Apart from these, the forest tangle was more or less thick everywhere, and then too, there was the labyrinth of rock and boulder lying around the crater.

The crater! Heavens! Like a flood of inspiration the idea took hold upon her mind. What if he had wandered further than he thought and had come out there? She recalled that that was the spot on the whole island, which had seemed to exercise a strange fascination for him. She recalled her own inexplicable intuition of peril overhanging that particular place, and her repeated warnings to him on the subject. Her mind was made up, thither would she first proceed, straight. But first of all, food might be needed, probably would be. Hurriedly she made up a package, hardly knowing what she put into it, and a wooden water bottle—another of his ingenious articles of manufacture. Then she took her bow and some arrows, likewise a short-handled, stone-headed club which hung from her wrist by a fibre thong; for these two primitives had fallen into

the primitive habit of never moving unarmed. Then she stepped forth.

What was this? She reeled half a dozen steps as if she had received a sudden push, then stood still swaying. Again she reeled forward, propelled as it were by an irresistible unseen force, staggered again and fell, and it was well that she did so, for she was now right on the brow of the cliff.

Leland raised herself on her hands and stared wildly forth. Heavens! What was this? That gradually increasing moaning sound had attained to a dull roar, and now the reason stood clear, and an appalling one it was. The sea in front and beneath seemed suddenly to be rising to the heavens, and yet there was no wind. It rose to a very wall. So terrific was the sight that she almost hid her face, as the vast, gigantic wave rolled in, leaping, it seemed, nearly to the height on which she was lying, then it curled over and the crash came as it struck the cliff with an indescribably appalling roar, beside which the loudest thunder clap she had ever heard was as the squeaking of a mouse. When the spouting volumes of spray, shooting up to an incredible height, had dropped again, nothing was to be seen of the beach, whichever way her eyes turned; only a boil of white, seething, leaping foam. Then she saw the sea retreat, leaving bare and exposed what had been its own depth for many fathoms. For a moment there was dead stillness, save for the hissing of the retreating water, and then she saw that mighty wall gather again. On it came, and the thunder shock of the concussion that followed seemed as though it would shake the whole island to pieces. Again

that wall of spray seeming to leap hundreds of feet towards the heavens, and again the sea withdrew, but this time to nothing like the same distance as before. But the recoil of these two huge waves which were not followed by another had lashed up the water in a broad belt of raging, leaping crests, and what made it more unearthly was the fact that there was not a puff of wind, and the water beyond, save for its natural swell, was smooth as glass.

Now to the mind of the terrified woman came returning reason. The earthquake, which had so narrowly missed throwing her over the cliff brow, was concomitant with this stupendous tidal wave. Leland had heard of such phenomena, and now she had witnessed one, in all its terrific and destructive might. Even now she was too paralysed to notice that their boat had clean disappeared, swept away, swallowed up, probably ground to sawdust, in that terrible convulsion. She hardly noticed either that the atmospheric conditions had, with miraculous suddenness, became nearly normal again. Then another terrible fear seized upon her, and she glanced up towards the cone expecting to see smoke and flame issuing therefrom; but no, it stood out calmly, placidly, against the blue of the sky, for the yellow, sickly, heat haze had also vanished. That was subject matter for thankfulness anyhow.

It seemed that this convulsion of Nature was over, for the time being at any rate. Leland, picking up her burden and weapons, set her face towards the forest. The birds, which had been silent during the cataclysm, were again lifting up their voices, piping and calling as though making up for lost time.

Every now and then Leland would halt, to sound her whistle and listen for a reply, but no reply came. Onward and upward she panted, with every step feeling more and more overwhelmed with grief and apprehension. Where was he? How—when—should she find him? Not living that was certain, or at any rate not conscious, otherwise her repeated calls could not have failed to elicit response.

She had reached the belt where the forest thinned down, then ended, and the rock labyrinth began.

Through this she took her way, sounding her whistle loudly. Still no reply. Then her heart leaped. Was that one or was it a far away echo of her own call? It was neither, it was only the scream of a large bird of prey launching itself from one of the crags.

Ah! a footprint—several—his footprints—and then her heart died again within her. These were very likely old tracks. Still she followed them. They led her out upon a spot where they two had often stood together looking down into the crater; where they had often sat together, and she had protested against the foolhardiness and risk, besides the utter uselessness of exploring it further, and now as she looked—why what was this? It *had* been explored further.

There were the first downward sliding steps, there again where they became comparatively firm. Then on again and—rock and sky seemed to be whirling round together, for the tracks ended on the lip of the crevasse where a newly made gap eloquently finished the tale. He had fallen to his death—to find

a grisly tomb in the soundless depths of the extinct volcano.

Leland sat as one turned to ice. She felt simply incapable in that dreadful stunning moment of speech or action. These rifts were of fathomless depth, all connecting with the main vent of the subterranean furnace. Well, for her the *world* might come to an end now. The tidal wave might as well have surged up a little higher and swept her off too. It did not occur to her for a moment that any other solution was possible.

She sat there as over a newly made grave, speechless, soundless, tearless, and then——

And then, starting out of her lethargy, she sat listening with all her might and main. Yes, it was. Surely she had heard something; something, too, down in the depths of the rift. Starting up she called. Distinctly it was a groan. Again she called and—rapture—came now a voice—his voice. He was alive then.

"Did you bring a rope with you, Leland?" it said.

"No, no. I never expected to find you like this, but I'll go and get one, I'll get all we have. How far down are you?"

"Not very far. Only about twenty feet," he answered. "If you get the two long coils that came in from the wreck, and any others that are handy, I can get out without much difficulty, without them I might as well be at the very bottom of the hole, if there is one?"

"But you are not injured, not hurt in any way, dearest?"

"No, no. Only battered a little. But now, be off as quick as ever you can, because I can't hold out for ever. Only travel carefully, for if you injure yourself I shall have to remain here till the crack of doom."

A word or two of tender encouragement and Leland was gone. She fully appreciated the necessity for promptitude.

Kerchival had been saved by a miracle it would seem. It happened that the vent into which he had fallen took a sudden narrowing at this point prior to expanding further down. Within this, in the course of his fall, he had become temporarily wedged, and he had contributed by his own efforts to make such wedging permanent. How he did it he hardly knew himself. He had got footing about the size of a walnut, for one foot, the rest was done with elbows and the other knee, and there for hours he crouched, hung over that awful black depth where the cleft widened out just beyond him. With the rope to steady him, not throwing all his weight upon it, he was confident of his ability to climb out. But—would Leland never return? Somehow time seemed to double itself, now that help was so near at hand.

At last the sound of the whistle came faintly to him. This was for purposes of encouragement. Then her voice from the rim of the crater above He shouted up directions.

"Stand where you are, Leland, and on no account move from firm foothold. Then when I give the word, throw all your weight back on the rope, as if you were playing tug of war, only if you find it im-

possible to hold on any longer you must let go."

"That's so likely, isn't it?" she answered, as she paid out the rope. "If you go I go. Well, I understand exactly what to do, so say when you're ready."

He gave the word. Gradually the line tautened. Leland braced up her splendid strength; well for her, well for both of them now, that the life primitive had developed and hardened this nearly to perfection. Planting each foot against a firm slab of rock, she stood, even as he had directed, her whole weight thrown back. There was not such a call on her endurance as she had expected. He was using the rope more for balance than for support; then he called up to her, and now he was nearly in sight.

"It's now or never, I shall have to hang clear for a moment. The rim bulges over ever so little. Can you hold on?"

"Can I? I will?" she answered. "Now."

Indeed at that moment it seemed that even her magnificent strength would hardly bear the strain. All her joints and muscles were cracking. She was wellnigh blinded with streaming perspiration. No, she would not let go. If her strength failed she too would be dragged down, but as for loosening hold—oh no, no. And then the strain suddenly relaxed. His head and shoulders appeared above the rim of the rift and the rest was comparatively easy. And those two primitives stood locked in a strong embrace while the red gold glory of the sinking sun enveloped them both as with a supernatural ray of benediction.

As they made their way down, she told him of the

cataclysm which had befallen but a few hours earlier.

"Yes, I did hear it," he said. "I thought it was thunder, but the earthquake must have been very local, in fact probably a submarine one; at any rate it couldn't have affected the cone or I should have been dropped to unknown depths if the thing yawned, or squashed flat if it narrowed." Then stopping and looking at her earnestly—

"Leland darling, you don't want to leave our island of Eden, now, do you?"

"Haven't you just returned to me from the grave?" was her answer.

CHAPTER VI

POSTED—" MISSING "

THE *Bonito* had been posted missing. She had merged from the comparatively hopeful stage of overdue to the hopeless one which spelt " missing."

Missing! What fallen and dashed hopes does not that single word conjure up? This is a small globe of ours, only twenty-five thousand miles round; a distance to be compassed by sea and land in six or seven weeks, but it is mostly on the sea that the whole vast loneliness of space is fully realized. Missing! The sinister word conjures up boundless potentialities, but of hope next to none.

Bastwick had been kept informed by Messrs. Ryle and Gilstrap, the owners, and had once run up to town to interview the firm, but had gleaned scant comfort thereby. The *Bonito* they declared, though not pretending to be a first-class liner, was quite a good sea boat and commanded by an experienced seaman. They must still hope for the best. Bastwick said nothing, but returned home under the fixed impression that the beastly old tramp had been over-insured and sent to the bottom on purpose; but then Bastwick was a cynic. Even

in this theory there was a hopeful element, because if it proved correct, her people would certainly have taken to the boats, whereas in the case of ordinary maritime disaster why the chances were all against anything of the kind.

Now his own attitude of mind towards this catastrophe was such as to puzzle even himself. On the receipt of Leland Goring's letter, he had, as we remember, allowed the floodgates of old memories to open upon him. In his solitary and thinking moments such memories, softened by time, would constitute an altogether pleasant and mellowing sense of anticipation. But as time had gone on, other sides began to assert themselves; some of them containing a tinge of bitterness. He had been treated very badly by the writer of that letter, as she herself had owned, and now after all these years why should his peace be upset once more? He gave the matter very long and serious thought. Was there any advantage to be gained by renewing these old relations, and, in short, trying to piece together a broken cord? He had about decided that there was not; and at this stage, the first intelligence as to possible disaster having overtaken the *Bonito* had reached him.

Now of all this he had said nothing to Ethne. His was a secretive temperament. He saw no sense in laying bare all his private thoughts or affairs to another person, simply by reason of the fact of their dwelling in the same house together. But the girl herself had not been so blind. Watching him with a furtive solicitude, she could not fail to observe that he had something on his mind,

something beyond the ordinary worries of a business nature incidental to his position. She felt concerned, but for all that the last thing in the world that occurred to her would be to try and arrive at a solution by any process of questioning.

By this time Ethne had fully recovered from her illness supervening upon cold and exposure on the moor. The spring had set in abnormally warm and bright. The trees were in half leafage, and the young tender green was gladdening to the eye everywhere. The pastures were merrily alive with the bleating and skipping of young lambs, and the joyous note of the cuckoo was beginning to make itself heard. Moreover she herself seemed to have undergone a change physically and for the better. She was not the same girl she had been before the winter. She had gained strength and with it a fullness of outline and a clean brightness of glance and elasticity of carriage which had not been discernible before.

"Why, what has come over you, child?" Bastwick said one day, as with his hands on her shoulders he gazed wonderingly into the glowing upturned face.

"Come over me?" she answered laughingly. "Well, I don't know what has. Why?"

"Why? Only that you look a different person altogether, and yet you haven't been away or anything."

"No, I haven't, and that's why, perhaps——" she answered, with a possible dash of meaning which may or may not have been patent to him.

Was this a time for asking him what she wanted

to know—as to why he got fits of abstraction and was not his natural self? No, she would not question him; it would all come out in good time or not at all. She had never questioned him in her life. She knew that he most particularly disliked it, and she was not going to begin now. So time wore on, and no news came of the missing ship. She might have disappeared into space. Being an insignificant and ordinary craft, even the newspapers hardly took notice of her disappearance, and one more dark mystery of the sea was added to the list of the unsolved.

Bastwick was not a little surprised at himself. True, the shock had not come all at once, but even then there was something sufficiently tragical in the sudden blotting out of one who had borne a critical and important part in his own life. Yet, somehow, the shock was not overwhelming. He thought it ought to have been, but it was not. Eight years! If he could do all that time without a given personality, he could go on doing so. Life had shaped itself for him since. Most people, he supposed, would vote him rather heartless; possibly he was; anyway, in candour, he certainly was not broken-hearted.

With the first shock of the news he would shut himself up in his library, and go over a great deal of the old letters which corresponded with the time of his receipt of that last letter announcing Leland Goring's impending arrival. He would attentively study the small Kodak snapshot she had sent him, but even this failed to awaken more than a genuine regret for one who has met with a

tragic end. So Ethne, to her growing relief, noticed that he began to resume his normal look. The secret care, whatever it was, seemed to have vanished; whereat she mightily rejoiced.

With the expansion of the year, Derek Hilton had likewise expanded—his runs afield that is; and such would bring him to Wood Bastwick, mostly at an illegal rate of speed, and with a frequency which was not popular with the then owner of that domain. We pointed out that his weakness for Ethne had become dead earnest. Now, this was not exactly a pleasing state of affairs to one person, and that person, the youth's fond mother. He might do so much better, was the parental dictum. She had only meant him to carry on a fast and furious flirtation with the girl in order to choke her brother off. And now he had fallen head over ears in love instead. The poor lady was disgusted.

She might have saved herself any anxiety whatever on the subject, for Derek, to use his own terse and wrathful comment, when reporting progress "got no look in." He was always on his best behaviour, too, on such occasions, but there was the ever present feeling of not being welcome, which was little to be wondered at, for his kinsman was beginning to find the youth more and more of a nuisance. He was always cropping up at the wrong times, that is in time to try and upset some arrangement just made; and on such occasions his said kinsman was—well—not nice.

But with the lovely spring days and early summer, Derek notwithstanding, the two inhabitants of

Wood Bastwick managed to put in a very good time indeed. Ethne, under her relative's tuition, had become no mean hand with the trout rod—indeed, on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion she had landed her first salmon, a lively, clean-run fifteen pounder—and now the two would go out during the pick of the day and take toll of the river, and it did not of necessity follow that her creel was very much the lighter of the two. Sometimes the rector would join them, and then one of Bastwick's outstanding jokes was that some inconsiderate bishop or other patron had planted Dr. Staley at Potterton for the rest of his natural life, with the main object of making his, Bastwick's, take look insignificant. As to which Mathers had something to say on his own.

" A'm thinkin', sir," said that worthy Scot to his master *in camera*, " that the Doctor will be takin' out more fish than any three men put together. Three dozen troot in a day should be enough for any man, but when it comes to five, why there should be a limit."

" That's all right, Mathers," was the answer. " The fact is, you're prejudiced. There are too many fish in the river already; if there were less they'd grow larger, as you know."

" A'weel, sir. A'm not prejudiced. I don't like priests shootin', but fishin's different."

" Well, of course, you can't object to them fishing," said Bastwick drily, " considering that the principal apostles all fished."

" Ay, sir," acquiesced Mathers, and then he added in his droll, Scotch way, " but A seem to

remember the nicht when they were nae catchin' muckle."

Bastwick laughed.

"I daresay you do," he said, "but the Doctor must have improved on his predecessors, for I'm blest if I or you can ever remember a night or a day when *he* took nothing."

"That'll be true, sir, the Doctor's a wonderful man with the rod. A'm thinking if there were no fish in the river he'd get a two pounder out of Cronshaw's Leap."

Now to Ethne all this time was time such as she had never known before. The day down by the river-side in the sweet pearly morning, or the golden rapturous evening, as the case might be, and the homing bees from the flowering heather sprays, so easily traceable against the blue of the sky, and the glad cuckoo shout, the musical flow of the river over the stones from reach to reach, and the rush and whirr of the line as the big trout was struck and given play. Then, again, the glorious sweetness of the evening air, redolent later with multifold scents of flowering heather and wild thyme, and seas of glaring gorse, and the glow as the sun dropped in holy majesty to the rim of the world. All, indeed, was an experience to be treasured, and, if ever it should come to looking back upon, to be enshrined.

She thought of how other girls, situated as she was, might have yearned for meretricious joys—those of the glaring, flaring, blaring ballroom or theatre, for instance, at exactly the time of the year when God's good open Nature was at its best

and most bountiful, and she did not envy these. No, not in the very least. The rectory girls, for instance, would go up and put in a stay with relatives in Town and come back full of it. But she, after a grand long day, or a golden, radiant evening in the open, thought she could afford to pity them. What did it all mean, she would ask herself, that she felt so wonderfully, unspeakably happy? Last year the same conditions had prevailed—the same lovely life in the open, the same life-giving, heart-cheering sport; everything the same, and yet——

Bastwick would look at her with a strange wonder, as they rejoined each other for the walk homeward after some such day. There was a marvellous glow of health and happiness in the girl's clear eyes such as he had never seen before, and it set him thinking. And then the ridiculous trod upon the sublime, as he remembered his sister's absurd letter. " Find another home for Ethne," he quoted to himself, choking with internal mirth. " Find another home for *me*. What idiots some women are if they only knew it."

One evening, just towards the end of dinner, he said:

" Ethne, I've come to a conclusion, and that is that I think you ought to go up to Town for a month and do a bit of ' season.' Now there's that cousin of mine, Adela Burningham, who'd be delighted to take you in tow for a month. Think you could be ready by the middle of next week? "

Ethne started, fairly started. She knew her relative's decisiveness of character, hence the start.

"But, Uncle Geoff, what if I don't want to go up to Town and do a bit of 'season'?"

"But if it would be good for you?"

"But if it wouldn't?" she answered in that deep, sweet voice of hers.

"Oh, you want to argue the point, do you?" he said with the dry humorous flash in his eyes which came there on slight provocation when he was feeling at his best. "And why wouldn't it, may I ask, since my opinion in the matter is challenged?"

"For an awfully straight and solid reason. Because I don't want to go."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Oh, well then, in that case there is no more to be said. Only—why don't you?"

She broke into a ripple of laughter.

"Why don't I? Why don't I? Well, because I don't. Is that reason enough?"

"Perhaps it is, perhaps it isn't," and there was that same dry twinkle in his eyes. "By the way, I'd forgotten that Derek had threatened to come over at the end of next week and teach us how to catch trout. But Ethne, child, it's your fault if you lend colour to the idea which prevails among a certain crowd of our delightful neighbours, that you are stewed up as a sort of a prisoner here. I offer you a chance of doing a month or two of London 'season.' Adela Burningham is just the one to work that oracle—and think—you'd be the rage among the millionaire pups, with all that colour and health and glow upon you—and you snap your

fingers at it and most deliberately throw it back into my face. Well, there's gratitude."

" If you say any more about London ' seasons ' or ' millionaire pups ' with this glorious sunset streaming over the ridge above Cronshaw's Leap and those two beautiful owls hooting to each other prematurely down there in the mist above the river, I shall simply shy these oranges at you, one after the other, until the dish is exhausted. I don't want to go to London or anywhere else, so there you are."

" There I am ? Yes, here I am, and it's very nice to be here under present circumstances. All right, dear, have it your own way. There's nothing like having things your own way—when you can get them, incidentally I've got things my own way too, so now we're all happy."

" Then you didn't want me to go up to London after all ? "

" Not on my own account, dear, only on yours."

Ethne said nothing. She felt. She knew that he was in earnest in making the suggestion, equally she knew that he was relieved when she had defeated it, although he turned it all off in his usual jocose way. For all that she saw underneath, and with the thought came a wave of appreciation which she marvelled had not come over her oftener than it had of late ; an appreciation of the unvarying consideration for herself in every single particular ever since they had been together. She loved him for it, and not only for it. By degrees he had become to her an ideal. She looked at him now across the table in his easy, quiet self-possession.

She contrasted him with every one of the species, male, which had ever come within her experience and observation, and it was all she could do not to get up and go over and fling her arms round him and say things. But to-morrow would rise in another radiant golden summer day, and they would be out in the pouring sunlight of it together.

CHAPTER VII

AN ISLAND OF THIRST

THE while time had gone on over the Island of Eden, even as it had over moor-encircled Wood Bastwick. Whatever latent feeling of discontent might have been growing up in the mind of one of its denizens, the sharp, short, awful trial when she had thought herself alone, had dispelled such. More and more she had lived the primitive life, more and more she had acquired perfect skill with primitive weapons. She could bring down the large wild pigeons, and other edible birds, with bow and arrow as skilfully as her companion; who had taught her also to strike and parry with two hard knobsticks, an art he had learned among a different type of savage to that which might by chance any day threaten their peace.

Be it noted that we have purposely refrained from going into any detailed catalogue of stores and necessaries or other useful articles which had come ashore from the wreck. Such detail is apt to be tiresome, and to furnish justifiable matter for skipping. It has been said that a fortunate supply of such necessaries had been thrown ashore, and these, thanks to careful management, had not come within measurable distance of exhaustion.

Further, as has also been said, the island contributed its quota in bird life, and the sea in fish.

No less than in the recital of reminiscent literature, did these two find pastime in song. Both had good voices, and it would have sounded not a little curious to those navigating within measurable distance of the island, suddenly to have heard the melodious blend of a duet, or the lilt of a single voice carrying out over the waters at night; for, as is well known, sound under such circumstances will carry to an incredible distance.

Those indeed were days of Eden, and by now it seemed to both that they could hardly have known another existence. Here, you see, was no room for outside sources of worry; for that cardinal curse of humanity, temper, which is largely caused by such. Primitive conditions, perfect health, the world far away, two units of humanity all in all to each other—there was the ideal Eden.

To one of them, the male to wit, this condition of things lacked for nothing. At home he would long since have been presumed dead; a home, in his case being a mere figure of speech; for he had no ties and such relatives as he had, rather disliked him than otherwise. With the world's goods he was but slenderly endowed, so much so indeed that there would be practically nothing for his said relatives to fight over when his death should be legally presumed, and this thought amused him. To the female, at first, there had been room for misgiving. She was nearly in the same position as her companion as regarded lack of home ties, and the possession of this world's goods. As regards

the first, such as existed were represented by Bastwick. What a far, far away time ago it seemed that she had written him that letter. Why, she had died and risen to another life, she almost told herself. Sometimes, woman-like however, she would let her thoughts dwell upon him and the times that were past. Would he take the tidings of her loss very much to heart, she wondered, or would he look upon it as rather a relief, relief from a possibly embarrassing situation? She thought this very likely; on the other hand, she did not want to think so—woman-like again. The days wore on.

The loss of the boat had been a great set-back. They had enjoyed paddling about among the reefs, and making explorations, sometimes quite far out to sea, also of the rock-bound coast and caverns inaccessible from the island. In one of these, however, they had met with an adventure as startling as it had come near being tragical, for they had found themselves in the middle of a number of huge squids. By a herculean effort Kerchival had succeeded in dodging a vast flail-like tentacle flung out over the boat, which had missed it and himself by half a yard. Then he had pulled till every joint and muscle within him had seemed to crack. But the monsters of the deep must have been equally startled, for beyond deluging the water with their inky discharge, they made no further attempt at the aggressive.

"That's not good enough," Kerchival declared. "Why, had that one tentacle got a fair grip on the gunwale, then good-night, and I'll swear the beast

who threw that one was thirty feet long if it was an inch. No, we'll have to be circumspect in our navigation of these delectable waters. I think to be skoffed by a lot of beastly cuttlefish would be rather an ignominious, not to say nauseous, ending to you and me, my Leland." And she shudderingly answered that it was so.

Well, the boat had gone now, and with it their power to take on any more risks of this sort. This time certainly it would not come back, as it seemed so miraculously to have done before. It would have been pounded to sawdust in the awful heave of the tidal wave.

Now suddenly another misgiving rose up, and smote Kerchival, so to say, between the eyes. It was at first like the proverbial and traditional and scriptural cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, then it spread phenomenally. This is figurative—in reality, the converse was the case.

We have said that there was one stream of beautifully fresh water which came tumbling down from the forest shades, delightfully clear and cool. It had struck him as strange that in all their peregrinations of the island they had not found another, but they had not; and now the misgiving which had arisen to strike him was the fact that this stream or runnel had become suddenly and alarmingly smaller. He watched it, assiduously, anxiously, for several days and—it continued to dwindle. Here was a prospect too frightful, too appalling to contemplate. If this stream should ultimately dry up? God! it would not bear thinking on. Every day he watched its course, every day put

pegs of measurement furtively in by the side of its trickle; furtively, for he would not impart to Leland the ghastly fear that had come upon him. At last he was obliged to, for she had observed him carrying gourds of water to cool and sheltered places such as holes in the cliff, or under a tree-root—anywhere to obtain the minimum of evaporation. Then the secret could no longer be kept—the runnel dwindling alarmingly and surely day by day; the only fresh water in their island, their realm, their island of Eden. When it ran dry what then?

"Oh, but we shall be sure to get some rain before that," said Leland the comforter. "One of these tropical storms will put things right for a year in the water line."

"Well, dear, we can only hope so," he answered. "In fact, we must hope so. Strange, isn't it?" he went on, measuring the dimensions of the hitherto-fore brimming, cascading stream which had dwindled to a trickling thread. "When I was climbing the Alps a few years ago I used to pull the attention of my guides to the enormous and absurd waste of water there prevailing. Every butt end of a glacier, however insignificant, shot off vast cataracts of no particular use to anybody in those localities, but it would have been of inestimable value, even if hired out by the day, to other people in different parts of the world that I knew. And now if we could only get the smallest of those glacier cascades switched on here—and we can't. That's the absurdity of the scheme of creation," he went on petulantly, "everything in its wrong place—nothing in its right—damn it!"

He ground his heel into the rock surface, staring moodily at the dwindling trickle. Something in his tone and the last fervent ejaculation struck Leland as comical, and she burst out laughing. He turned and looked at her.

"Ah—ah! That's right, darling," he said. "Make a joke of everything, it saves the face of many a situation, does that glorious saving sense of humour. Well, well—let's suppose that things will mend. We could afford to welcome a tornado that should blow the island half out of the sea, if it would only bring us the saving grace of a deluge of rain."

But nothing of the kind supervened. Day after day the sun rose; sometimes clear, sometimes brassy and hot. And their one life-supporting runnel of water, now reduced to a mere trickle, in parts a mere dropping, seemed to vanish, and that not slowly, beneath their very eyes.

And now in this impending extremity, lying awake at nights, Kerchival would recall with bitterness that chance he had let go by, the ship which had passed in the darkness and which he had deliberately refrained from signalling. No such chance had recurred, and that for months. No such chance might occur, and that for years. And here they were with their water supply—not slowly but quickly drying up before them. This beautiful island of Eden promised to be their cemetery. But first, one of the most torturing, terrible forms of death—that of thirst.

The sun's heat grew apace with each succeeding day. The runnel was not altogether dry, but what

water there was left in it was now standing in almost stagnant basins with hardly a trickle over each. At last there was none. Then Kerchival said, gloomily—

"We must fire the beacon now, dearest, before our island of Eden becomes our island of death."

It has been said that a large pile of brushwood had been erected for an emergency. This had been almost forgotten, but now, with the prospect of a ghastly, lingering death staring them in the face, it was remembered again. This beacon was built on the highest point of the cliffs, about half a mile from their shelter and camp.

"Well, I suppose it must be done," she acquiesced, though not at all heartily. "But I don't suppose it will help much."

They went up to the dominating point. A large pyramid some fifteen feet high, like a badly constructed haystack, rose around a tall pole. With a torch carried from their ever-burning fire, Kerchival set alight to this. The accumulation of stuff smouldered, then burst into flame. Huge volumes of smoke went billowing up into the cloudless blue, then spread out into a vast plume which floated slowly out to sea. It was their first signal of distress—of distress after so many long and happy months.

"Well, that cloud of smoke ought to be seen all over the world," said Kerchival with lame jocosity, "and let's hope it will, for we are up against something rather hopeless, there's no denying."

They watched the flame and the smoke soaring higher and higher in silence. It was near night,

and they worked hard, piling on fresh loads. Then, tired out, they retired to their shelter.

The night was close and hot and sultry, its thirst-producing properties seeming in every way exaggerated, just because the precious store of life-saving fluid was almost a thing of the past.

"Well, it won't help us now to skimp our store," said Kerchival, as they woke up at midnight, each with an unquenchable thirst. "We must keep up and trust to luck for a change. Here—this is cool," uncorking a large calabash and pouring out a bowlful of its contents. She swallowed it greedily, but as she did so she noticed that he hardly swallowed two mouthfuls, and objected at once.

"Sit tight, dear, and don't worry about me," he answered. "I'm not particularly dry——" this was about the biggest lie Kerchival had ever told in his life. "When I am I'll have my pull in turn, you know, turn and turn about."

She looked at him and shook her head. "Only I don't believe it will be turn and turn about," she said.

"Yes, it will. By the way, I suppose it was that infernal earthquake cut off our water supply. Depend upon it that had a lot to do with it. Now go to sleep again and don't worry about me."

Kerchival sat there keeping ghastly vigil, and now all sorts of absurd cruelties afflicted his mind. These dangled before his mind's eye, reminiscences of his club and iced cup in the middle of this or that sweltering London day; of cool, delicious tankard in the shade of a horse-chestnut in front of some radiant up-the-river inn; of long "pegs," musical

with cracked ice against the tumbler rim, in any part of the world; of crystal water leaping beneath resinous pines on the slope of some great Alp; of everything, in fact, which he should not have suffered his mind to dwell upon now.

He went outside, and paced up and down restlessly. Even the newly risen moon seemed to take on a sort of deputy glaring effect of the sun. He took a few turns up and down, then went back and taking up the calabash shook it Music! Music indeed! One mouthful, one mouthful! He looked at Leland sleeping, but not restfully. He put the water down again. For all the mad raging thirst that was upon him he would not touch a drop. It was a large calabash, and with care might last out several days longer, but he would not touch a drop. It must be all for her.

He went out again and instinctively his steps turned to the runnel. He burrowed in its basins with his hands and with sticks, and he might as well have scraped the surface of the rocks. Beyond what that calabash in there held there was not a drop of water on the whole island. For three days the runnel had been simply sun-baked dryness. Their island of Eden had become an island of thirst-death.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PERIL FROM SEAWARD

KERCHIVAL was gazing out over the blue, glassy sea, his hands shading his eyes in the usual attitude when gazing at any distant object. The more he gazed the more anxious became the expression of his face, and the object of his anxiety took the form of several tiny specks on the far horizon, becoming less and less tiny the longer he gazed.

"I don't like it," he said, frowning and blinking from the effects of the strong sunlight. "The white of a sail would have been one thing; that over there, in these seas can only mean another, and—heading straight for our island. They must have seen our smoke." The note of anxiety affected her.

"Perhaps they are ship's boats," she said. "Castaways like ourselves; but they might get us away from here."

"Ah well. I'm afraid our Eden is reliable no longer after that narrow shave of the day before yesterday."

On the night of that day, when their water supply had come to nearly its last drop, the very occurrence for which they had so fervently wished had

come about. A furious tornado, with torrential rain, had whirled away their strong and ingeniously contrived shelter, like a rag of brown paper, and gone crashing in a devastating line through the forest. This they had not minded. The first thing they did was to spread every vessel that they owned, to receive the refreshing downpour. And then—what a drink! Nor was this all, for the runnel was full again and its discoloured waters cascaded merrily down to the sea.

"Just in time," Kerchival had said, and then both had agreed that it was wrong to take any further risks of this nature. The same thing might happen again. Death by thirst had literally stared them in the face; it would never do to risk a repetition of it; and having come to this decision they had kept their beacon blazing and smoking day and night ever since.

It will be remembered that Kerchival had been against any smoke signalling, on the ground that it might attract foes as well as friends; and indeed it was just such a formidable danger which seemed to be threatening them now. So decided at any rate one of the watchers, as he marked the enlargement of those far away specks. Specks no longer now, but just definable as so many canoes, their occupants paddling might and main, heading for the island at a rapid pace, as though with a common and well outlined object.

"These are no ship's boats," pronounced Kerchival. "I'm afraid our troubles, so far from being at an end, are only beginning, at any rate since our luck changed. We shall have to stow

ourselves away somewhere. Poor old McTaggart"—naming the chief engineer of the ill-fated *Bonito*—" wasn't yarning when he said this group of islands was manned by a particularly objectionable crew of cannibal savages. Savages these are unmistakably, but as to whether they are cannibals, it is our direct interest not to give ourselves the chance of finding out. Come."

He reached forth his hand and she took it. They turned away from the rocky promontory from which they had been taking their observations and hurriedly traversed the intervening distance to their shelter, such as was left of it. Here they collected as much as they could carry in provisions, bows and arrows and clubs, and both bearing their loads they struck into the forest.

Both were in the very pink of physical condition, and they took their way through the thick tropical foliage, up the steep and rugged slopes, as easily as if they were walking in Hyde Park. Finally they gained the rocks around the crater. Now from this altitude, they looked down upon their shelter and the sea beyond, and this is what they saw. Eight long canoes were coming into the bay, furrowing up the glassy surface as they rushed swiftly onwards, and the watchers could distinguish that each contained ten as villainous looking a lot of savages as this world could produce; their black, shining skins hideously tattooed in blue and red, their kinky hair plaited in long spikes greased with some red substance, and sticking out from their heads like the traditional devil's horns. Each craft contained ten, except two, and those, the hindermost, contained

but four each and they the most hideously bedecked of the lot. But in the middle of these two crafts humped a strange heap, as it were something under a mat, and the watchers could have sworn, even from that distance, that it heaved and moved.

The flash of the paddles throwing up cataracts of spray was regulated to a kind of weird, undertoned chant, then this ceased as almost simultaneously the canoes were beached, and their occupants sprang to land. Now they were seen to collect long, wicked-looking, barbed spears and formidable stone-headed clubs.

"Even old Robinson Crusoe was in better case than we are," observed Kerchival, half grimly, half humorously. "He, at any rate, had an old blunderbuss of sorts, while we have nothing but these bits of stick, which I daresay those beauties down yonder are a precious sight better hands at using than ourselves. But they may have a look round, and go away again and leave us alone."

Leland shook her head.

"Not they," she said, "and even if they do they certainly won't leave behind all our stores."

"I'm sorrowfully afraid not," was the humorous reply. "Now I wonder what the mischief there is in those other canoes or who. Perhaps it's some unfortunate devils they've brought here to skoff, a sort of 'man Friday' business over again, and yet we're in the twentieth century."

"We've no use for any 'man Friday,'" answered Leland decisively, "let alone two of them. It would only be a case of those brutes of Dagoes over again."

Woman the tender-hearted, you see, was merged in woman the practical. This particular one was turning experience to account, which is the acme of common sense.

"We won't go out of our way on account of any man Friday, I guess," declared Kerchival. "I don't propose to declare war on all of the cannibal islands, or even one of them, on such flimsy grounds as that. But now, dear," growing suddenly grave, "if it should come to a 'scrap' you remember the strike and parry I taught you?"

"Don't I?" and her eyes flashed as she gripped the tough knobsticks. And standing there in an unconscious attitude of grace, a splendid courage shining out of her large grey eyes, she might have been some Viking heroine of yore instead of the up-to-date, high-bred English girl of the twentieth century, and indeed many a worse ally in danger's hour might a man have, even of his own sex. This one realized as much as he looked at her with an intensity of love and admiration.

"You are grand," he exclaimed, passing an arm around her. "Yes, utterly and entirely grand, but I don't suppose it will come to our having to distinguish ourselves, most likely these are lazy beggars and won't take the trouble to scratch through this thick bush after us. They'll first grab whatever they can of what we left down there and clear."

But although he spoke with lightness and confidence he was far from feeling it. He felt pretty sure that the invaders would quarter the island to find out who was on it, but he did not want to

begin by croaking. At the same time he was thinking, what a blessed chance it was that the said invaders had come when they had. What if they had landed in the night or in the small hours of the morning? What if they had surprised them in their sleep? No, that would not bear thinking about. And all this time the two had been drifting on in a sense of peace and utter security.

"It's all that confounded beacon," said Kerchival. "If we hadn't fired that we shouldn't have had this hornets' nest about our ears any more than we had before. Well, now we shall see what we can do with them, unless they leave us alone. The thing will be to keep ourselves entirely out of sight, and shoot to kill. That'll strike them as very bad medicine indeed."

The invaders, having indulged in copious draughts at the watercourse, had now gained their shelter, and the two fugitives did not fail to notice that they approached this with some caution. Having satisfied themselves, however, that the coast was clear, they proceeded to turn over and examine what things had been left there. Their deep guttural chatter of astonishment over what they found, reached to the ears of the pair, and the innate suspicion and doubtfulness wherewith they handled some of the things found gave great cause for merriment to the unseen lookers on. It was like a troop of great black monkeys engaged on an investigation, hence the fun.

The situation, however, was not fraught with fun at all, for it was obvious from the tones and gestures of the invaders that these had no intention

of taking themselves off so quickly; only one thing, however, seemed to make in favour of an early move, and that was that two of the canoes had not even been beached, and those the ones containing the four men and the mysterious-looking freight. Then suddenly the savages began quartering the ground, as though in quest of tracks.

"We shall have them here directly," murmured Leland. "Oh, love, I've a presentiment that we shall not come through. No, I'm not tired of our Eden, as you've sometimes thought. I would ask nothing better than years and years of it. I've only known what it is to live since I've known you."

She broke off, her voice shaken by a whirlwind of passion. Gravely, sadly, he looked into her eyes.

"If our time has come, darling, at any rate we are not separated. I, too, could not have believed the world could contain anything so perfect, so idealistic, as our time here has been. We'll do our best, but in case of accidents"—this with a hollow attempt at gaiety—"we will have one real good-bye."

They kissed each other, long and clingingly, as two people similarly situated might do on the eve of a protracted separation instead of on the brink of eternity—eternity to be reached through the gate of a violent death. Then with every nerve strained, but firm and cool, their primitive weapons ready to hand, they waited for the coming peril.

CHAPTER IX

OF THREE NEW ENEMIES

THREE score dark demons quartering this small island like questing hounds, what chance had these two? Three score dark demons to whom mercy was as utterly unknown as, say classic Greek, to whom massacre was simply a delightful prelude to the gratifying of a dreadful appetite for the flesh of human beings. This was the odds to be faced by these two, and one of the two a woman.

Now not a *thing* escaped them. They could trace the advance by the occasional shake of a tree or a bush in the sea of vegetation below. They noted, too, the frightened scurry and alarm call of the birds every now and again, and drawing nearer and nearer as the advance of their enemies closed in, What they did not note, however, in their tension of waiting was a certain strange, lurid, oppressive haze in the atmosphere, very much akin to that which had precluded the convulsion on the day when the vast tidal wave had swept the shore.

Now as they stood—the man tall, broad, a very model of firm power and muscular strength; the woman equally splendid according to her sex—

each ready with bow, and arrow on the string, their other primitive weapons on the ground beside them all to hand, surely it would be hard to recognize this twentieth century pair as they knelt beside their rocky breastwork awaiting their relentless enemies; and they knew it was to be a fight to the death—with all the odds in favour of death.

The ground in front and below was open save for a few thin tree stems. Into this sprang a full score of their foes, these, too, tall and powerfully built. If they had looked abominable and hideous as seen from a distance, they looked ten times more demoniacal now. But there was no time to take in effects. Both bowstrings twanged simultaneously and a frightful yell of anguish and amazement arose, as two of the assailants fell to earth, kicking; each transfixed in a vital part. Quick as thought the bowstrings twanged again and similarly two more went down. Demoralized now the savages half halted; this swift and certain death leaping out of the unseen *was* demoralizing. Instinctively they made a move to take cover, but one gigantic demon, springing aloft, hurled a great barbed spear at random. It struck Kerchival in the thigh, causing plentiful effusion of blood, but even in the act of hurling it an arrow from Leland's bow met him full below the chest, and the great savage swayed and crashed to the ground in bubbling, gasping death throes.

"Lucky we went in for considerable archery practice all these months," growled Kerchival, grinding his teeth in the rage of pain, as he wrenched the spear-head clear of the wound; and, fitting an

arrow to his own string, he launched it at one of the disappearing bodies. A wild, fearful scream told that it had reached its mark. "Six already," he added with grim satisfaction. "Why, we couldn't have done better with firearms. Only——' and he broke off as he realized a consideration that might conceivably prove serious. What if their arrows ran short? They had not been able to bring as large a stock as they could have wished. But at any rate so far they had made the most of what they had. One life for each shaft was not bad practice.

Their enemies had disappeared; not for good they were well aware. This was the boding stillness of the calm which sometimes interludes the storm. Their eyes were quick to note, too, by the shaking of the tops of the bushes, that the rest of the invaders were hurrying up to reinforce these.

"Love, is it serious?" murmured Leland, in a tone of thrilled anxiety, as she examined the wound.

"No, a mere scratch. Now what are they going to do next?" Both gazed forth anxiously. The oppressive, lurid haze had deepened, unconsciously affecting the spirits and courage of both. Then a renewed movement of the bushes and tree tops. The pair gazed into each other's eyes, hardly daring to express their relief. Their enemies were retreating. Yes, they had clearly had enough, and now the watchers could see them making for their canoes. Here in the now silent forest lay the bodies of the stricken assailants, two out of the six still feebly moving.

"They have got as much as they want," pronounced Kerchival. "Still, it was a near thing, but it's a lesson to us. We'll have to be a precious sight more careful in future. I shall have to do sentry-go at night, and I think it wouldn't be a bad thing if we were to change camp, move our ranch up here for instance. It would be a bit safer—— Hullo!"

A misgiving struck the speaker, also his listener, that they were not yet out of the wood, that their plans for the future might be somewhat premature, for their late assailants, although they had reached their canoes, did not embark; instead, they were calling out something to the occupants of the two craft which were lying off, and in the result these were promptly run into the beach.

"Whatever are they going to do now?" murmured Leland in wonder and concern. "I thought we had got rid of them."

The other did not answer immediately. His brows were contracted into a set frown, as he anxiously watched for the next move on the part of their enemies.

These were gathered in a half circle round the newly beached craft, the hubbub of their voices betokening a state of wild excitement—of expectancy. Suddenly they scattered to right and left, and no wonder. For—what was this?

From the two last canoes were issuing four huge serpents, belonging to a kind that Kerchival had never seen before in any part of the world. They seemed akin to the python tribe, and yet not, for they were jet black. This, then, was the mystery of the

humped heaps that looked like sacking and that had seemed to move. But—what next?

The monster reptiles glided lazily to and fro, their hideous heads raised from the ground, the coils of their squirming length dragging along the sand. They seemed to take no notice whatever of their human spectators, who stood watching them now in dead silence and at somewhat respectful distance. Not all. The silence was broken by strange cries uttered by the savages who had been in charge of the two newly beached canoes. The monsters stopped as though listening, then glided forward all in the same direction, with a decision indicative of fixity of purpose; and the direction they were taking would bring them straight up to where our pair sat watching.

To the latter the situation was now manifest, and it was one the horror of which would scarcely bear exaggeration, for it resolved itself into this. They were being hunted—hunted, instead of by hounds, by these huge, frightful, powerful reptiles, which clearly had been trained for such purposes; yes, trained, for in obedience to certain varying cries issuing from those who had been in charge of them the creatures moved to right or to left, or even straight on. The bulk of the savages were advancing at a little distance behind, now keeping silence.

"Oh, for any sort of magazine rifle or even a ·500 express," muttered Kerchival to himself. Then he glanced at his companion. What had become of her nerve? Her face had gone deadly white and she was shaking.

We made mention of a certain constitutional re-

pulsion which Leland entertained for things that crept, although on an occasion we saw her destroy one specimen of the serpent race, with deft, quick skill. Yet that had been insignificant compared with these, and now a few minutes more would find her—would find them both—enveloped in the unutterably repulsive coils of these gigantic reptiles and slowly crushed to death. Better, infinitely better, the spears of their bloodthirsty enemies than such an end as this; nor was there any chance of avoiding it, for arrows and clubs, though efficacious against naked savages, were mere puny toys when opposed to such monsters as these. The splendid courage she had shown when pitted against human enemies had clean evaporated. She had become the shrinking, trembling, helpless woman.

Kerchival was quick to realize this, and he knew in a moment that he must count her out of the fighting line here. Yet what sort of fight could he himself put up against this kind of foe, miserably armed as he was? Even his strong heart sickened.

There was silence now, but he could again mark the advance of the enemy by the movements of bush and tree tops, and the flight of scared birds. What he could not mark was the sinuous glide of the grisly monsters over the ground beneath. He felt his arm clutched.

"Kill me," gasped Leland. "You have a knife—kill me now. Strike here—or I shall go mad."

He shook his head gravely.

"No, no," he said, "don't lose nerve, darling. There may yet be a way out. Come, we will go higher up."

But even as he spoke, a long cruel, hideous head arose from the ground barely twenty yards off, followed by an enormous coil of jetty blackness. Kerchival set his teeth and picking up a rock—a mighty weight even to one of his thews—he launched it straight upon the middle of that coil. It fell with a dreadful squelching sound, then the air was filled with appalling hissing and the ground itself seemed almost to shake as the mighty length beat upon it in disabled agony. A ghastly and terrible sight, but the man laughed aloud and grimly, as he found another and similar rock. He had knocked out one of those weird and formidable enemies, but there were still three more of them, not to mention the ruthless human foes behind.

Another of the hideous lengths arose right over them. Rearing itself up, the horror towered above, swaying its frightful head and neck, and hissing fiendishly as it made a dart at Kerchival. This he avoided by a rapid spring; by long training, quicker in his movements than the gigantic snake. As he did so he fitted an arrow to the string. It transpierced the great squirming shape just below the neck, but not with deadly effect. The huge coil swept round, knocking him flat. In a moment it would be around him crushing out his very life. Already the great jaws were open to seize him, when——

There was another twang of a bowstring. The reptile, struck clean through its uplifted head, sank to the earth, beating the surface in its death throes. Leland was standing, proud and dauntless as before.

His peril had broken the spell. She had recovered her nerve.

The two stood, side by side, back to back, ready to continue their fight to the death. A perfect mania of combat had come over both. They positively longed for the sight of an enemy, but—no enemy appeared. And then——

What sound was that? Not the shout of their threatening foes. Not the weird cry of magical encouragement to the huge dreadful reptiles employed to hunt them. For it did not emanate from mortal throat. A trembling, rumbling roar was shaking the hitherto firm ground. Both swayed and tottered; it was all they could do not to fall flat. At the same time they became alive to the existence of a haze of sulphureous smoke, which in the excitement of the conflict and peril they had hardly noticed.

Again the roar. This time more deafening. A vast column of black smoke and ashes leaped skyward, and again the ground rumbled and shook. Both crouched there with glance dilated on this new phenomenon, their human and ophidian foes all but forgotten. The volcanic cone, which they had deemed extinct, had sprung into full activity and that without the slightest warning. Well, they were in very truth between two fires now. They must either stay here and be incinerated or rush down on to the spears of their enemies.

Again and again the huge column belched forth, leaping to a height of a thousand feet, the opaque black mass now lit up by a glow of flame, but with the quick succession of gigantic jets—hardly able

to follow each other fast enough—the ground had grown firm. It no longer oscillated and swayed.

"Come. We must get further down and chance it," said Kerchival, as several stones in a state of incandescence came hurtling and hissing down among the trees around. "Our friends yonder seem anxious to get away. Look!"

It was even as he had said. The savages, now panic-stricken, were making all haste to regain the beach; of their destined prey and the hunting snakes they now seemed to have no further room for thought. One or two quick calls went up from the owners—or trainers—of the latter, and that was all.

And now a dark and inky pall spread over the sky, shutting out the light of day. From twilight the still, ghostly forest had taken on the gloom of midnight, though lit up by the flash and flare as the flame from the savage volcano rushed skywards with a thunder roar. These two, hand in hand, made their way wildly between tree trunks and tangled vegetation, a hot ash from the threatening cloud of destruction falling on them more than once and burning them. Blinded, half stunned, wholly unnerved by this awful convulsion of the forces of Nature they at length gained the beach. The canoes had disappeared.

Stay—all but one. Quickly Kerchival made for it, but Leland instinctively drew back. It still retained the horrible effluvium of the reptiles it had transported thither.

"Now, dear, we can't pick and choose," urged

Kerchival. "In you get. I suppose the owners are hunting for their remaining devils of snakes. This island's going to be a burning hell in a few minutes. Our Island of Eden!"

They pushed off. The canoe was a fair-sized one and not nearly so light as it looked. Yet by dint of strenuous paddling, they had placed about three miles between themselves and the shore, and none too soon, for—with a roar like that of all the trumpets of doom—such a mass of flame shot up to the heavens that it seemed as if the whole world was rolling up with the fiery scroll. It fell back in torrents—so awful and yet so magnificent that its two spectators could only gaze on it paralysed and breathless—raining fiery destruction over the fair spot which had been their resting-place for all these happy months, enveloping the whole island in a torrent of fire. The very sea inshore was hissing, and the forest was aflame with gigantic crackling roar, its smoke mingling with the stupendous discharge of the hidden forces of the earth. Then the throes of the convulsion sank. The sea out here and around them, hitherto of an unearthly glassy stillness, now heaved in a mountainous swell, on which the light craft rolled and swayed. The island was a mass of seething fire, and even this far, out at sea, hot ashes were falling.

What was to be the end? This was the question in the weary eyes of each as their glances met. Here were they in a frail, primitive craft, out on the wide sea alone, even now beginning to feel the pangs of hunger and thirst—especially thirst—after their trials and exertions, without one crumb of food or

drop of drink between them. But there was no turning back. As one of them had predicted the island which they had left was now a burning hell from end to end.

CHAPTER X

NEWS

"ETHNE, I believe I was dreaming."

"Believe? Why, of course you were. I've been swishing the flies off you for the last quarter of an hour with this bunch of heather."

"Have you? You dear child. That's like you, always considerate."

"Well, what were you dreaming about?" asked Ethne.

But her kinsman shook his head with a half-puzzled sort of look and did not immediately reply. Instead he filled a pipe. The two were seated chin deep in heather. The crow of cock grouse sounded impudently on either hand, as though its emitters still realized that they had a goodly time of grace before them ere the fatal Twelfth. A little way off, against the skyline, the old Gibbet cut into the declining sun path. Below, in the valley, the plash of the cascading river, around the melodious hum of bees and the squeals of two objectionable and particularly lively peewits, whose scolding noise and propinquitous swoop was an act of presumption upon a perfectly uncanny instinct that mere man would not be carrying a gun—yet.

"I was dreaming about some one I once knew,"

he now answered gravely. "And yet with a curious vividness. But the dream was utterly absurd, as most dreams are."

Ethne was interested, keenly interested, but she said nothing. She knew her relative's way. He would go on in his own good time or he would not go on at all.

"We were in the old peel house together," he continued, "rummaging about among the old, worm-eaten, bat-haunted interior. It was pretty real, too, and yet I know now that the subject of my dream can't possibly be alive. In fact, she was lost at sea."

Two things struck Ethne. First, of course, the sex of the one he once knew, second the strange, troubled, depressed look which had come over him as though he had imparted the subject of his dream to her moved by a powerful impulse to unburden himself to some one. Another subtle instinct led her to connect this with the state of mind she had observed in him lately and had secretly deplored. Now she ventured—

"Won't you tell me about it?"

"No, I don't know that it is much use. But here we are up on the moor. I light a pipe and drop asleep and get a stupid dream; by the way, I've had so many stupid dreams in my time, that they've long since ceased to interest me. Well, well. Still, it's very strange that one should happen to see anybody and hear her voice when you know you'll never see her again."

Ethne did not know what to say. Her relative had got upon perfectly unaccustomed ground..

He was always more or less inconsequent, that was one of his characteristics, but this tired, almost pathetic touch was quite foreign to him.

"Shall we get along home, dear?" she said. "I believe the heather's getting damp, and you've sat quite long enough in it."

"Yes, I suppose we'd better," he assented, standing up. No cloud was in the sky, the radiant glory of a rare sunlight streamed over the reddening moor and the green pasture land below. Away over the valley opposite stood the house against its background of grim Scotch firs, fortress like on its high knoll. They took their way down the moorland path, the same path down which they had travelled, Ethne remembered, on that dark, cold evening when she and Derek had been lost on the moor in the mist. Then over a long stretch of pasture, where a number of shaggy, long-horned, fierce-looking Highland cattle—fierce-looking with their eyes staring out of rope-like, curling frontlet—in reality, gentle, tame, as so many young calves, as they came up to the two in obedience to the invite of an outstretched hand, to have their foreheads stroked.

"Poor things," said the girl. "It's horrible to think that they should have to be killed sooner or later, and they are so confiding and friendly."

"One of the cruelties of Nature, my dear child," answered Bastwick. "The red law of Nature spells destruction for something for somebody else's benefit."

The river ran here in long smooth reaches. On the bank stood a man at one end of a trout rod, throw-

ing out a practised cast with a swirl beneath the opposite bank. Both stood still, unseen by him, while he struck and reeled in a three-quarter pound trout.

"Hullo, Staley," sung out Bastwick. "What did you get him in with?"

The rector turned in the act of unhooking his fish.

"Wickham's Fancy," he answered. "I'm going to try white moth when the sun drops."

"Oh, bother 'the sun drop.' Chuck the trout to-night. There'll be plenty left to-morrow. Come in and have pot luck."

The rector laughed. Then half hesitatingly—

"Well, I believe I will, Bastwick. It isn't every country parson who has a neighbour to give him *carte blanche* over a few miles of excellent fishing that he can afford to thwart that neighbour's inclinations, especially when they tend to culminate in some superlative port, etc. But how the deuce can I dine in brogues and waders?"

"Oh, that's not an impossibility," laughed the other, "especially as it isn't for the first time, and that being so, you know as well as I do, that there are plenty of shoes in the house. So that's settled."

"What sort of catch have you made, Dr. Staley?" said Ethne.

"Now, child, that's not the sort of question to ask right under your uncle's nose," reproved the rector in his dry way. "It's as bad as the third party asking a man if he is making a long stay bang under his host's nose, when he's putting in the traditional, but irregular and unsatisfactory, invite of 'a day or two.'"

"Ha-ha, quite right, Staley," laughed Bastwick. "In other parts of the world fellows have given me an invite to come out, 'some day,' and have a shoot on their stock runs. I used to always say 'But when?' And as often as not the answer would be, 'I'll let you know' and, equally as often as not, they never did let me know."

The while the rector, who had been reeling in his line and filling and lighting a fresh pipe, was ready. While they took their way over the green, peaceful pasture in the delightful evening glow Bastwick fell out of the conversation. That dream of his of which he had spoken to Ethne in no very serious fashion, had taken hold on him for all that. He had almost begun to forget. The subject of Leland Goring had begun to take its place in the background of the past, and now why on earth should it come back to him as it had done, have obtruded itself, and that vividly? But his silence passed unnoticed by the other two. They were deep in laughter or chaff, for, as we have said, the rector was possessed of a dry, humorous wit, and he and Ethne had always been great friends.

"It's a pity you're not all here, Staley," said Bastwick as they reached the house. "How would it be to turn out a trap and fetch them, or at least some of them?"

"Oh no, no. Don't bother about that," was the answer. "Besides they've got something on, in getting ready for a sale of work or something of the kind or at least I believe they have." This last came out in a tone that set Ethne off in a peal of laughter.

"Well, that is good, Dr. Staley," she said. "You don't seem very sure over a fairly important matter concerning the parish."

"Oh, needle driving's the women's department. I never trench on that."

"Well, Staley," said Bastwick, when they were seated in the middle of a particularly snug and well ordered dinner, "which is the best, this or trying the white moth? Well, you know, the fact is we're getting a bit too old for these river mists. Means laying up a crop of rheumatism, you see, for a little later on. What's the news? I haven't seen a paper to-day, at least I hardly glanced at one. Newspapers and posts are the curses of life; for the first I'd be glad to take only, say the *Sunday Times*, for the second, once a week would do me admirably."

The rector mentioned a few political items, which met with scant interest from his host, for if there was one thing that Bastwick hated it was politics. Then he went on—

"By the way, Bastwick, did you see that news has come to light at last with regard to that missing ship? You know there was very little about her in the papers because she was an ordinary cargo boat and therefore of no account, but the case somehow interested me, and it caught my eye directly in to-day's *Mail*."

Bastwick suddenly stiffened up.

"What missing ship?" he said easily, calmly, though aware that his voice sounded strange to himself.

"Why, the *Bonito*. She was posted missing

some months ago. It was supposed she had foundered with all hands, on a voyage from Sydney to Liverpool. She carried passengers, too."

"Oh yes. I remember seeing it mentioned," said Bastwick. "Some of these infernal shipowners ought to be indicted for murder. I believe lots of them only send their rotten tubs to sea to be scuttled or piled up. Well, what sort of news has come in about her?"

"Why, two survivors have been picked up at sea, a man and a woman. Both in the very last extremity and a sort of native canoe. They seem to have had a most extraordinary experience, a sort of mixture of Robinsoe Crusoe and the grand eruption of Krakatoa. I wonder you didn't notice it."

"Yes, perhaps," answered Bastwick. "But as I said, I only skimmed the papers and so suppose I missed it."

"Well, it seems the most extraordinary thing," went on the rector, "a sort of thing that a romancist could make any amount out of. Why not send for the paper and look at it?"

"Oh, it'll keep," was the answer. "We'll look at it when we go into the other room."

Now this was Bastwick all over. His mind immediately concentrated on what he had heard, and yet he had made such mistakes in his earlier days through doing even the most trivial things on impulse that now he would restrain himself in anything approaching impulse even in weighty matters, but he was thinking whimsically, if grimly, how picking up a friend and bringing him in to

dinner should result in a revelation which certainly had the effect, as far as he was concerned, of spoiling the harmony of the evening. And even then he told himself that logically it was right. Of these two picked up castaways the only one who could by any possibility be of interest to him was in all probability not that one at all, so why worry—prematurely?

When they got into the morning-room, for Bastwick did not use the large drawing-room, except when there were a lot of people, holding that it was much snugger for the two of them in the small one, he put up Ethne to sing a song or two. Then—

"Oh, by the way, Staley, about that missing ship of yours," and he pressed the button of the bell. "Cherriman, get the morning papers, will you?" as the butler appeared in response. "Here we are," he went on as the papers were brought in. "The *Mail's* the best because you always know where to find anything in it. Here you are: 'Terrible tale of the sea.' 'To-day were landed at Liverpool by the s.s. *Jadoo*, bound from West African ports, presumably the only two survivors of the ill-fated *Bonito*, which it will be remembered was reported missing several months ago. They have an extraordinary tale to tell of the ship having been driven on to a reef in a tornado, in what must have been one of the island groups in the South Seas. On this island they seem to have sustained life fairly comfortably for the intervening months, till the eruption of a supposed extinct volcanic cone drove them to put to sea in a wretched native canoe. They were picked up in a state of utter exhaustion, in the ex-

tremities of hunger and thirst, by the Norwegian sailing barque *Gjeilo* and transferred to the *Jadoo*. The ill-fated pair were passengers. Mr. Arnold Kerchival and Miss Leland Goring. They report that at the time of last sighting it, the whole island was a mass of flame.' "

"Yes, that's a curious sort of adventure," remarked Bastwick evenly.

"I should think it was," said the rector. "Do you know I'd like to interview those people, and get the thing from them at first hand."

Bastwick smiled to himself. He thought how very likely it was that the speaker might have his aspiration gratified, at any rate as regarded one of the two.

"What an awful experience," said Ethne. "But before that experience I wonder if they got rather sick of each other, all that time on an island alone together."

Both her hearers burst out laughing. The remark came out so naïvely. To the one who appreciated the full tragedy of the situation, this comment was all the more unconsciously humorous. To the other, who did not, well, it was humorous all the same.

"What's the joke?" said Ethne, looking from one to the other. "I didn't know I'd said anything comical."

"But you have, dear," answered Bastwick, "though, like most of your sex, unconsciously."

Perhaps the humour of the remark referred to, and of the situation generally, was destined to come home to her later.

But when he was alone the whole force of the situation came over Bastwick. That dream, when he had drowsed off among the heather up on the moor—and almost immediately afterwards its partial fulfilment! Why, there was something little short of miraculous about the blending of circumstance. Leland was not lost then, but here, comparatively speaking, at his door. Of a truth there was a great deal that we did not understand, he decided.

All sorts of mingled feelings came upon him. Was it such a relief, the news of her safety, as it would have been—say at the time when he had received her letter? Well, he was too old to put himself out seriously about anybody under the sun—at least, so he told himself.

CHAPTER XI

THE ARRIVAL

ETHNE was listening for the sound of wheels. She had been, we may be sure, speculating as to the appearance and *personnel* of the expected guest. She had also an instinct lurking in the background that possibly she could do very well without the same. Her relative had not even shown her the inadequate portrait; he had wanted her to form her opinion of its original entirely on first impressions.

Then she heard the sound of wheels. The room in which she sat did not face the drive. She heard the sound stop, and almost immediately afterwards the door was softly opened and Cherriman's well trained voice announced—

"Miss Goring."

Ethne rose. She had formed her own opinions of the new arrival, and now they were upset. From the little her relative had told her, she had expected to behold rather a faded, jaded, generally washed-out specimen of her sex. But whatever she may have been like before, those months of life on the island had stamped their mark on Leland Goring. Nor had the subsequent peril and hardship

availed to deteriorate. Here was nothing faded or jaded, but a strong, supple-framed woman glowing with splendid health. In short, a presence, and yet Ethne did not feel in the least insignificant.

"How strange it is to be here again," Leland began, "and that you and I should meet like this. Why, I don't suppose we ever heard of each other before, although we are related."

"No, I don't suppose we ever did," answered Ethne with a smile. And though outwardly pleasant, that former lurking instinct seemed to deepen in her mind.

"What an exquisite-speaking voice this girl has," said Leland to herself. "Eyes too, and hair—why, she's lovely, and no fool either." Her own feelings towards the object of this comment were curiously mingled. Had it been uttered at the time of penning her first letter they would not have been mingled at all.

For her part Ethne was sizing up the other, and her impression was all favourable. As far as Leland's appearance struck her there was not a fault to find. But—again that instinct.

Leland throughout these amenities was wondering, with the nearest approach to nervousness which she was capable of feeling, what sort of reception she would meet with from Bastwick himself. The letter he had sent to welcome her and to invite her here, had been brief and, to any one unacquainted with his way, might have seemed curt, but Leland was not unacquainted with it; wherefore she only smiled to herself and decided that he,

at any rate, could not have changed much. And then he came in.

One swift straight glance exchanged between the pair might have told its own story or might not. Bastwick's greeting was gravely cordial, while Leland's was perfectly self-possessed, but with a charming touch of deprecatoriness about it, due to the nature of their last meeting.

"Why, Geoffrey!" she exclaimed, "you look younger than ever."

"Do I?" he answered.

"Why, yes, of course you do. Now aren't you going to say something of the sort with regard to me?"

"Oh, I never make personal remarks"—but there was a flash of mirth in his eyes—"and at your tender age, Leland, you oughtn't to need compliments in that form."

"Now I wonder if that is meant for satire or not?" she said. "It has a sound that way and yet—I don't know—— Is it?" she ended innocently.

So this was the meeting between two people who had not seen each other for eight years, Ethne was thinking. Not two ordinary people at that, for she had, of course, filled in such outline as Bastwick had given her with embroidered romance of her own, but she was not so unsophisticated as to imagine that hearts were worn on sleeves, so whatever there was behind, would find its level. To this end she made a move to take herself off, and leave these two together. But Bastwick detained her.

"Wait a bit, Ethne. You'd better pilot Leland to her room, it's close on dinner-time, and I've got some important stuff to finish for the late post."

Whatever Leland thought as she followed Ethne upstairs she did not express aloud. After eight years they met. She had been wondering how they would meet, and now, after the exchange of a few chaffing commonplaces, and that in the presence of a third person, Bastwick had coolly dismissed her to her room as if she were a schoolgirl home for the holidays. Her mind reverted to a "seeing off" that very morning, to another face, likewise a strong one, and yet it was full of passion and feeling as that last good-bye was uttered, and the train glided out of the noisy smoky terminus, and she drew a contrast. This one after eight years showed no more feeling than if they had parted yesterday. At that moment Leland felt resentful, wicked, almost murderous, and by some curious twist such feeling included, with its object, the girl in front of her.

But for the episode of the Island of Eden, Leland would have been under no sort of doubt as to the course it behoved her to pursue. Now, however, she was torn two ways, or rather she was not, but could hardly feel sure of her own self. While on the island her love for Kerchival had been all engrossing and genuine; restored to the world, especially to a place fraught with all sorts of old associations, somehow the other halo seemed dim. There are plenty of women of this type, and Leland was only a specimen. Kerchival was poor. That did not count on the island. Bastwick was not

poor and she had loved him once, or thought she had, at any rate he had loved her. But now—why his reception of her could hardly have been cooler or more easy-going if she had been his sister. "Ah, the girl!" thought Leland with a vicious snap of her very shapely teeth.

Just then Ethne turned. There was that in her look which was so aggressively suggestive of clear and radiant youth, as to hit the older woman clean between the eyes. She was fully conscious of her power to draw; to draw and to hold; but, she was past this fresh unlined youth, not youth of the just-escaped-from-the-schoolroom order, for Ethne's repose of manner bespoke a natural finish which was all her own.

"I think you have everything you want now," said the girl with a comprehensive glance round the room.

"Quite, thanks," was the answer. "I've only just got into the way again of putting on civilized clothes, but I daresay I'll manage. What a lovely look-out you've got from here; and the moors at their very best. Why, that must be the ridge over Cronshaw's Leap over there."

"Yes, that's right," answered Ethne. "How long is it since you were here?"

"Oh, years and years, and then only for a short time; still I remember it well."

"Well, I'll leave you for the present," said Ethne. "You know your way down."

Left alone Leland went on with her thinking. And now it took the form of how easily this girl seemed to fall into the *rôle* of *châtelaine*, while she

who had been at Wood Bastwick before the other was heard of, might have been actual *châtelaine* here now; and she was only a guest.

Leland in evening dress showed sun-tanned, even freckled; and this Ethne was quick to notice as they sat at table. She likewise noticed several little chance scars about the other's splendid neck and arms, scars that looked like burns, and it seemed as if her thoughts were read, for Leland laughed.

"Don't scrutinize me too closely, will you, Ethne? For I suppose I ought never to wear low clothes again. But if you'd had to scramble for your life all down a raging, erupting volcano, you might think you'd come off cheap with these little tokens of the fray."

"Well, now let's hear the yarn," said Bastwick, "because as yet it seems we haven't had time for any talk at all."

"Whose fault is that?" she answered softly, and as Ethne thought insinuatingly. "Well, you know travellers' tales are proverbially a bore. There was no point in my inflicting any on you—— Now, aren't you grateful to me?"

"I'm not for one," said Ethne. "I want to hear some of your experiences."

"Really? Sure?" and the other turned to her with a very sweet, winning smile and expression.

"Yes, really sure," answered Ethne, laughing too. "Of course we got a very bald and circumscribed account in the papers. But we want one badly at first hand."

"Yes—only I don't know where to begin," laughed Leland. But she did begin, and somehow

she seemed to possess an abnormal gift of descriptiveness; for she held them both spellbound as she narrated her experiences from the time of the wreck. Especially the culminating climax, of the landing of the savages and the hunting snakes and the sudden and terrific volcanic eruption.

"Well, that is a record," said Bastwick. "What's become of your companion in adversity now, Leland?"

He was watching her under the question. Leland, too, was watching him. She thought whimsically the hair about his temples had grown greyer.

"Oh, I left him in Town," she answered. "By the way, Geoffrey, it would be rather jolly if you could get him down here for a little. I'm sure you'd cotton to each other. And he's like me—rather alone."

"That's a curious life experience you've gone through, Leland," observed Bastwick after a moment or two of silence. "Fancy you being shut up on an island for months alone with one man, and on top of it wanting him to come down here."

She recognized the old cynical ring in his tone, and now it jarred upon her. There was no great contrast between these two she told herself; in fact, had she been stranded with this relative of hers under the same circumstances and for the same period, she was pretty sure that he would have come up to the mark as fully as the other had done. Ah, she was in a shocking state of wobble was Leland Goring that first night of her arrival at Wood Bastwick.

" Perhaps you don't know me as well as you think, Geoffrey," she answered, infusing a touch of sarcasm into her tone.

" No, perhaps not. They say we change completely every seven years, and I think it's eight since we had the opportunity of seeing whether we've changed or not. Well, we'll talk about it to-morrow. This companion in adversity of yours seems very much of a sportsman after all, and as you say, possibly we might cotton. What does he look like, by the by ? "

" Why, in build and way he's very like you, Geoffrey. I'm not sure he's not a trifle uglier though." Now at this, uttered in a sweet, conversational tone, both her hearers burst out laughing; one whole-heartedly, the other not quite. Ethne was conscious of a latent resentment. But Bastwick thought it the greatest joke he had heard for a long time.

" Oh well, Leland, if he's a trifle uglier it doesn't matter, so we may safely get him down in a day or two. Who is he, by the way ? "

" Oh, he told me all about himself. He seems to have been pretty much of a knockabout all his life."

Bastwick smiled behind his hand. Leland noticed it and secretly resented it. Ethne noticed it and did not. It began to look as if the atmosphere around Wood Bastwick might begin to get charged.

Yet the evening passed easily, pleasantly, to all outward appearances. But underlying it, Leland was puzzled. She had found Bastwick still where

she had left him. That is to say, he had not increased his establishment by one, or two, or three, or any number, within the limit of eight years. But she didn't know what to make of him. He had talked about a change in every seven years, and as far as she was concerned, such change seemed certainly to have come about. What had befallen in the meanwhile? When bedtime came she would insinuate herself into Ethne's room for a confidential chat. But somehow when bedtime came, Ethne had said good-night to her in such wise as to show that she was disposed for no such arrangement. Ethne had certainly become very much the *châtelaine*. She, Leland, had reckoned on filling that *rôle* herself, even if temporarily, but that would rest with her. Now, she had found that it did not rest with her at all. This indigent orphan, whom she had thought to relegate to a back seat, did not seem in the least inclined to accept that secondary position; in fact, it was perfectly obvious that she would not.

Ethne, alone in her room, for the first time during a long period felt troubled. This stranger—to her—seemed to have brought a new element into her life, into their lives. She had been there one evening, yet somehow things seemed to have changed. She could not have told why, but they had. She threw open her window and looked out over the meadow land sloping down to the moors, over the moors rising against half the suffusing moon. The call of a curlew came familiarly through the night, and the faint murmur of the river upon its rocky reaches. Now she realized how she loved every scene and

association connected with the place; not for the first time but perhaps more vividly brought home to her, and yet—what had such got to do with the arrival of this stranger?

CHAPTER XII

THE OTHER ARRIVAL

THE *Trout and Skylark* at Potterton was a very fair sample of the so-called old-fashioned village inn. The title of its sign suggested the delicacies of the season, but this was delusive, at any rate so found its rare and only visitor when he came down to breakfast. The curled and succulent rasher was represented by a sodden steak of pork a quarter of an inch thick and internally raw. The golden, milky new laid eggs might have been offered for sale in a grocer's shop for electioneering purposes.

"Fresh, wholesome country fare," pronounced the aforesaid visitor, surveying this. "Dairy produce—h'm."

Having sent back the defective pig twice, to approach some semblance of cookery, he gave it up as a bad job, sent for a pint of ale and then made free with some very hard and biscuity toast, for of such is the leaven of our traditional and trumpeted wayside inn in this realm of England.

Having finished a doubtful breakfast, he went to his kit and got out a trout rod and all gear appertaining. Having set this in order, he adjourned to the river which flowed behind the village of Potter-

ton. He took a look at it and did not cast in; on the other hand, he withdrew and walked nearly a mile higher up before beginning operations. This was brighter in prospects, the fresh breeziness of the air all that could be wished. The tempting circles in the water beneath the opposite bank spoke for themselves, and soon sport was running merry and free.

The sportsman felt quite pleased with himself for the time being; incidentally, sport was not what had brought him to Potterton in the first instance, but being there he thought he might as well fill in time with putting in some of it. He had just reeled in a nice fish, in addition to several already in his basket, when he became aware of another presence. A man, unmistakably a keeper, was hailing him from the bank.

"A'd like to see your leave, sir."

"Leave? What do you mean?" answered the other. "I'm staying at the *Trout and Skylark* at Potterton, and they've got this water, haven't they?"

"No, that they haven't, sir," answered the other. "You are a good half mile up Squire Bastwick's water now."

There was a good deal in the *up*, to account for the keeper's civility of tone. The trespasser had been casting upstream, which under the conditions of the day showed that he knew his business. A good keeper is always a sportsman, and Mathers was a good keeper.

"A' weel, sir," he went on, "I doubt that Squire Bastwick would give you leave if you asked for it.

But there's nae rights of fishing here for the *Troot and Skylark.*"

"Oh, all right," said the other. "I'll be moving back again. By the way, I've taken out three or four fish—perhaps you'd better take charge of them."

"You'd better be keepin' them, sir. It's nae the fish that the Squire be particular aboot, it's the fishing."

"Oh, ah, that's all right," answered the other. "Here you are, keeper, you'd better drink my health," chucking him a half-crown.

He had reached the bank and was standing in his dripping waders. It was a charming point of the river. A hanging wood came down to the water's edge, and on the further side an old mill with its mossy disused wheel nestled against another hanging wood. The keeper had hardly time to pocket the *largesse,* when he exclaimed hurriedly—

"Here comes the Squire himself, sir, but you'll ken I was telling you this was his fishing."

The trespasser turned. Bastwick was sauntering leisurely along the woodland path and—not alone. He looked somewhat hardly and stiffly and inquiringly at the stranger. But his companion did not. The colour of amazement leaped to her cheeks, as she came forward impulsively, both hands outstretched.

"You? *You* here? Why, where have you dropped from? Where on earth? I, we, ought to be accustomed to strange things by now. But to find you here like this!" She paused for a moment, and in that moment, meeting him again in the midst

of the glowing green woodland, brought back vividly the old life of the island. The setting made all for it. "Geoffrey, this is Arn—Mr Kerchival."

"Oh yes, yes, yes," said Bastwick. "Of course; I'm very glad to meet you," putting out a hand "But may I ask first of all where you are staying? and secondly, why did you not let me know you were in these parts. Surely Leland's fellow-castaway might have known he would be welcome."

"You're very good, Mr. Bastwick, but the fact is, I only arrived at the *Trout and Skylark* last night and have just learned that I was trespassing, though all unintentionally, on your water, as this good chap will tell you," turning to Mathers, who was standing respectfully, though not uninterestedly, in the background.

"Well, then," went on Bastwick, "I hope you'll cut short your custom with the *Trout and Skylark* and come up and stay with us. I can send down for your traps as soon as you like."

"Thanks, that's very good of you," answered Kerchival, "and as I make a point of never refusing a good offer, I'll take you at your word." But the while a thought ran through his mind. "With us" the other had said, and it did not somehow ring right, although in truth Leland's recognition of him had rung true and spontaneous enough. And while he was walking along the woodland path chatting with her and his prospective host, his thoughts were busy. He was thinking how Leland's correspondence had dropped, so to say, rather near freezing point. She had been quite a long time up here, and during that

time he had heard less and less of her. Hence his determination to pay a personal visit to these parts and see for himself how the land lay.

He had not been happy since parting from her. Again and again in the loneliness of civilization—and nothing can be more lonely to a man of small means and small acquaintance—he had wished himself back on the island with her, on their Island of Eden. Now he found her again, and they had met all unexpectedly, and she and this distant relative of hers, of whom she had told him so much, seemed on the very best and closest of terms. That he had seen at a glance. Well, if he had not been first in the field, at any rate by every right he had the first place in it, and he was not going to relinquish it to anybody. All this ran through his mind as he strolled along, talking easily, naturally, with both of them, for he was one of those men, who could concentrate on two subjects simultaneously. But there was one thing upon which he had then and there made up his mind. It might sound melodramatic even to him, but he would yield her up to nobody.

The suggestion made by Leland, upon the evening of her arrival at Wood Bastwick, had not been urged, somewhat to her kinsman's surprise and certainly relief; the latter mainly because he did not want to be bothered with any stranger. For her part Leland had declared that picking up all the old reminiscences of Wood Bastwick was all she wanted for the present. Her relative, reading her like a book, had smiled sardonically to himself and acquiesced. It was all the same to him whether her companion in adversity came now, or later, or did not

come at all; and watching her it struck him that it was all the same to Leland.

So this was how Arnold Kerchival came to Wood Bastwick.

Now if her stay had been a pleasant one to Leland Goring—indeed, a very pleasant one, so much so that she had neglected, as we have seen, to urge Bastwick to invite the partner of her exile—there was one to whom it had not proved a source of unmixed pleasure. Ethne would have indignantly denied any possibility of being moved to jealousy, and would still; but she had come to the conclusion, and this she would not have denied, that you might have a little too much of Leland Goring. She herself had been Bastwick's all day and every day companion for years now, but never so much companion as for the last few months. And now it seemed that she was being gently but firmly forced into a back seat. Not by him. Oh no, but somehow Leland was always on hand, was even in her deft, insinuating and therefore masterful way, ordering the arrangements. Ethne felt more and more bitter, but even then did not show it. She was endowed with her full share of self-command, and still managed to be as outwardly serene, and even smilingly pleasant towards the other, as though she were not wishing at every hour of the day that the said other would take her departure and never come back. There was one thing, however, at which she had steadfastly drawn the line, and indeed felt no temptation to overstep it, and that was allowing herself to be drawn into the confidential stage. And more than once Leland had thrown out feelers in that direction.

"Ethne is a strange girl," the latter had said, one day when alone with Bastwick. "You don't get any nearer with her."

"Nearer? Why, I've got near enough since she's been here. Why can't you?"

Leland mentally whistled. This was Geoffrey's plain, brusque way of putting things, she told herself. Outwardly she laughed.

"I suppose we women take each other differently, my dear Geoffrey," she answered.

"I should think you did. We male mortals don't get on the confidential stage with each other unless we are very young and absolute fools. Wherefore why should you?"

"Because we're different, that's all. Can't help it, but we are."

There were ways in which Leland would, to use a polo expression, "ride the other out," over and above a tendency to take general charge; for instance, if a path was too narrow for three, it was always she who would somehow manœuvre to be walking beside Bastwick. Other things she would manœuvre. She would engineer him out for an impromptu stroll round the garden, what time Ethne was otherwise engaged, or she would profess to anticipate his tastes and ideas. Not one of which circumstances escaped Ethne. For the first time in her young life, the girl had come to know the meaning of the passion of jealousy—black, furious, secret jealousy. How would it end?

And yet, withal, Ethne was never for a moment conscious of a sense of insignificance beside the more splendid and mature charms and presence of the other

woman. She had her full share of pride, pride in the right place, as distinct from that abominable feminine, mulish form of obstinacy which masquerades under the same name ; and this taught her to recognize equals but no superiors, which is the real pride of the thoroughbred ; and it enabled her to keep her feelings to herself, as though they were shut down beneath an iron lid.

On one occasion Derek Hilton had come over to Wood Bastwick, and then a little faint and amused curiosity had wakened in the girl's mind as to how the new arrival would strike him. For she knew that the latest was always Derek's last. But he had remarked—

" I say, Ethne, it strikes me that the old Boss and the shipwrecked Crusoesse are getting rather thick. Is she an old flame of his, by any chance ? "

" Oh, the silly booby ! " said Ethne to herself. Then aloud—

" Hadn't you better ask *him* ? "

" There you are, Ethne. A fellow can't say anything nowadays without you getting sneering and satirical."

" Then why does ' a fellow say anything ' ? " was the even-toned answer. " Especially anything superlatively nonsensical ? "

" Well, I don't know. She's a spiffing fine spess," he retorted, critically eyeing one of the pair, who happened to be walking in front. " Not in her first youth perhaps, er—but still——"

Derek had put on the sort of manner which Ethne invariably found insufferable. She could not resist the snub which rose in her mind.

" While you *are,* Derek ? " she said sweetly.

Before Derek took himself off that evening Ethne was intensely amused to see how the " spiffing fine spess not in her first youth " had completely attached him to her chariot wheel. For was not the latest invariably Derek's last ?

And then Kerchival had come to Wood Bastwick.

CHAPTER XIII

A TOUCH OF THE PRIMITIVE

IT is difficult to say exactly how these two men got on together. They would have got on splendidly under ordinary circumstances, for, as we have said, Bastwick always got on with his own sex. But here came in the apple of discord, which spelt the inevitable woman.

Not that this element of discord was mutual by any means. It was, if anything, one-sided, and the one side spelt Kerchival.

He, for his part, had noticed a subtle change in Leland. He was a strong, downright, passionate man, with little sympathy for, or understanding of, subtle change. He looked back to the island and their life together, cut off from the world, and there were times when in the intense bitterness of his soul he would wish that the fiery torrent of the volcanic hell had engulfed them both.

In that past and happy time Leland had told him a great deal about this relative of hers, and even then a twinge of something very near akin to jealousy as to the unknown had run through him. Now he found her here, on exceedingly happy and confidential terms, apparently, with the said unknown. In-

deed it would have puzzled an observing stranger to determine which of the two she most favoured.

Not that in all honesty he could find it in his heart to blame Bastwick. His demeanour towards her was simply that of the old friend and distant relative —it was characteristic of Leland that she had never enlightened him as to the real and closer relationship which had existed between the two. But her own attitude towards Bastwick had given him cause for doubt, and serious, poignant heartache. For the man had gone through the one great experience of his life; so great an experience that it had become an obsession, and one calculated to throw him out of all sense of proportion.

To Ethne he had taken a liking, and the two had become friends at once. The girl was never tired of getting him to talk of his experiences, to which she would listen with vivid interest. She was sympathetic and appreciative, he decided, but—she was not Leland.

And yet, to all outward appearance, things were going smoothly and pleasantly enough. Kerchival, as we have shown, was a sportsman, and he and his host would contribute their efforts towards depleting the river of its speckled denizens, while Ethne and Leland would join them in a picnic lunch all in the glorious summer weather. The casual observer aforesaid would have pronounced it hardly possible to drop upon a more harmonious group, and yet—and yet—the corrosive element was eating into the peace of one of them."

"I must really learn to catch trout," declared Leland, on one of these occasions. "After the

whacking big fish I used to haul up when we were on the island this looks rather tame, but you people seem to find it so fascinating."

She was lying on the grass in an attitude of voluptuous ease, her hands locked behind her head, her fine frame thrown out in all its full symmetry of curve. Here again Kerchival found himself involuntarily drawing contrasts—contrasts between the strong, helpful, energetic woman who had so ably filled the *rôle* of companion in adversity for all these months and the rather languid—he did not like to call it affected—manner which was upon her now.

"Well, there's no difficulty at all about that, Leland," said Bastwick. "I daresay Kerchival and I between us could make you flick a floating leaf, at the end of an eighteen foot cast within a week. Eh, Kerchival?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said the other in an expressionless tone. "I've taught Leland a few things of late, one more or less would come comparatively easy. What do *you* think, Miss Cheyne?"

"Oh, there's no doubt about that," returned Ethne. "By the way, that archery kit we've ordered ought to have come by now, but it hasn't, and I'm dying to learn. Fancy having to shoot for your living, and that not with a gun but with bow and arrows. It seems incredible."

"Well, you know, it does rather," said Kerchival. "But if your shop people are dilatory much longer I shall have to rig you up with the home-made article as we had it over there. Eh, Leland?"

"Why, yes," was the ready answer. "It would remind one of old times."

But the reply, given as it was, somehow failed to soothe. To Kerchival, in his then vein, the word "remind" was jarring, as if any reminder were needful. However, he said nothing. And then he and his host took up rod and basket and went to their respective beats on the river again.

Ethne was not throwing a line that day. She would dearly have liked to, but she had sacrificed her inclination to the duty of bearing Leland company.

"What a fine, ready, resourceful man, Mr. Kerchival is," she said, as, left alone, the two began to stroll about the wooded bank together. "And how lucky you were in being fated to be Robinson Crusoe with him, of all people in the world."

"Yes, that's a fact. He's all that," returned Leland animatedly. And the genuine ring underlying the answer struck the other and also puzzled her; perhaps it even a little bit relieved her. But the last only momentarily. She supposed Leland was acting, as usual, and apart from any other consideration she was wholeheartedly sorry for Kerchival. For of course she had long since seen how matters lay with regard to him. Her aversion for her present companion did not decrease.

The latter turned to her suddenly.

"How should you have liked to have been in my place, Ethne?" she said.

The sudden directness of the question slightly startled the other.

"I shouldn't have liked it at all," she answered slowly. "I'm afraid I'm too matter of fact and humdrum, and the romance of a desert island would not

have appealed to me. It would be too like being in prison, for one thing; shut off from the world."

Leland smiled, with just a pitying touch.

"You're shut off from the world here, child," she said. "Why you say you haven't been off this place for more than a day or two, for how many years? I forget."

"Ever since I came. But I don't grieve over that, I can assure you."

Again the other turned that half-pitying smile upon her.

"Quite sure?" she said.

"Dead cert."

Inwardly Ethne was raging. She was accustomed to this kind of tone by now or ought to have been. Still it never failed to arouse her to what the theologians call the sin of anger.

"I have everything I want, and I have been perfectly happy all this time," she answered with an additional deepness in her voice. "So why in the world should I be unhappy because I don't go somewhere else where I don't in the least want to go?"

Leland looked at her.

"Well, you are a record," she said. Then lapsing into the jocular, "Now supposing you and Geoffrey had been locked up together in that island of ours, and having to pull through things as we did, would you have been as happy then? Eh?"

She darted a quick, merry, searching glance at her companion and—was disappointed. Ethne did not turn a hair.

"I daresay I should," she answered, with perfect calmness. "When you are with someone who cares

for you, and for whom it is a pleasure to do everything, what else matters ? "

Leland burst into a clear ringing laugh. A startled jay sprang screeching from its retreat in an ivy-covered oak, to light on a bough further down and blink suspiciously at its disturbers.

" Upon my word, little Ethne," Leland went on, " as I said before, you're a record. Yes, you are."

Ethne thought that her turn had come. She resented intensely the patronizing diminutive.

" And were you so glad to break away from your Island of Eden, for that's how you described it more than once ? " Leland, you will see, had lapsed into the confidential, wherefore now it was her turn to look a trifle disconcerted.

" If you had gone through the experiences I did, you might think perhaps you'd had enough of it, no matter whom you were with," she answered in a studiedly hurt tone. " I can tell you, my child, it isn't exactly plum jam to be hunted by savages and snakes, to be nearly roasted alive, and twice to come within an ace of dying of thirst."

" Well, no, I oughtn't to have forgotten that," was the answer, with a dash of compunction.

They had come to the edge of the wood, and in front and around stretched the expanse of purple moorland and green pasture with the riband of swirling river gleaming at intervals between. In the distance against the sky rose the grim Gibbet.

" I wonder Geoffrey doesn't pull down that horrid thing," said Leland disgustedly. " I wouldn't have it standing there as a perpetual reminder of the barbarities of a barbarous age."

"Well, it's a curiosity and rather a rare one," answered Ethne, scenting an air of potential proprietorship in the remark, and duly resenting it.

"Yes, yes. The Bastwicks have traditionally always had gloomy tendencies," rejoined Leland with a light laugh. "I suppose we'd better stroll home again as soon as we can. By that time tea will come in rather well, I imagine."

Here again Ethne scented that air of potential proprietorship, but she acquiesced. It will be seen that the atmosphere surrounding the hitherto peaceful Wood Bastwick was becoming more and more charged.

"Well, we'll go by 'the footbridge' then," said Ethne. "It shortens the way by more than a mile. At least—if you've the head for it that is," she added, perhaps a trifle maliciously.

"Head for it? Head for a footbridge," echoed Leland wonderingly. "Why not?"

"Well, you ought to have, considering all your hard, wild experiences of late. Come along then."

They had reached a point where the river rushed foaming through a short but deep chasm—very akin to The Strid by Bolton Abbey. This was spanned by two strands of steel wire, some six feet apart, one above the other, secured to a stout Scotch fir on each side. The method of crossing was to sidle along the lower strand, while holding on to the upper, and it was a method not to be attempted by any one wobbly of nerve, for to be hung out over space, like a spider on a thread, with a foaming rushing torrent churning beneath, requires some of the latter attribute. Mind over matter again, you see.

h. "Come along. I'll go first and show you the way," cried Ethne. "All you have to do is to keep absolutely calm, and work your way across with hands and feet. It's as simple as A.B.C., but there are lots of people who don't like undertaking it."

"But—what's the use of it?" asked Leland, who with all her experience was eyeing the contrivance not altogether at her ease.

"Oh, it's used by the keepers and others to save going a long way down by the ordinary bridge. Uncle Geoff and Derek Hilton often use it, the rector isn't too fond of it, by the way. Well, are you on?"

"Of course." It was not likely, thought Leland, that she, with her wild, hard, savage experience, was to be daunted by an imaginary obstacle that this inexperienced, stay-at-home girl took as a matter of course.

"Come on then." And Ethne let herself carefully but deftly down the wires, running in an easy glide, for there was a slope from the brink which was rather trying to a nervous beginner. Then, gaining the level, or what corresponded to level, she looked back over her shoulder and laughed.

Now with this a strong wave of recollection swept over Leland. Her dream in the island! The girl in that dream now took shape in Ethne. It came back upon her with impelling vividness. In the dream the scene had been the brink of a black, cold chasm; here and now the circumstances were different, except that that of height was far greater and more imposing. With it a wave of hatred flooded her mind; the half-mocking defiant look, perhaps [illegible]

helped to emphasize, to exaggerate this. In a moment she had seized the upper wire and had let herself down.

The impetus of her slide, which she had not regulated as she should have done, brought her nearly in violent contact with the one in front, and two people hanging on two wires about thirty feet above a torrent syphoning between rock walls, cannot afford anything of that sort.

"Take care?" cried Ethne warningly. "Hold tight."

The other, whatever might have been her intentions, now found it all she could do to steady herself on the swaying wires, but they met with a slight impact. And then Ethne saw that in the other's face which she did not in the least like. But what was beyond her range of vision was that the woman who had reverted to the primitive, even for a few months, might be in the primitive still.

"Come on after me," she called, deftly contriving to keep at a certain distance ahead. "You're all right, only don't look down."

She to whom this crossing was pretty well an everyday affair, gained the top of the sloping wire with ease and reached down a hand to help the other up.

"So much for our 'footbridge,' Leland," she cried, laughing and panting slightly with the exertion. "Now I don't believe with all your experiences you've had one quite like that."

"Well, no—I haven't. But perhaps some of those I have had would make you faint, *little* Ethne, wire footbridge and all."

There was a certain snarl underlying the tone

which made Ethne doubly glad she had led the way across—at leading distance. All sorts of unconventional things happen every day, given adequate motive, she remembered.

"Well done, well done, you two," cried a voice, hearty and male, as they stood looking back on the scene of their crossing. Kerchival stood where he had been watching them all the time. But in his jovial congratulation there was no trace that he had gripped the element of tragedy, which had been there right under his eyes. But then so it is with tragedy under conditions of civilization; it is always unexpected, wholly unlooked for.

"Oh, that's nothing, Mr. Kerchival," said Ethne with a laugh. "We often use this wire, though there are some people who don't care about doing so."

"Here, let me have a try at it," said the man, laying down his fishing-rod. "I haven't been to this particular spot before, and Bastwick never told me about it."

He slid down to the wire bridge with ease, and in a moment had worked himself half way across. Was there something in the act which brought back to Leland the time when she had drawn him up from the crevasse in the island crater? It might have been so. For instinctively she put forth a hand to aid him as he reached the nearly 45° angle of the wire in its ascent to the brink. Perhaps it reminded him too, for there was a look of the old love in his eyes as, not disdaining her aid, he pulled himself up, laughing, on to the firm ground beside her.

"But what are you doing here so early in the after-

noon ? " she asked. " I thought you were getting a lot more trout and wouldn't be in till long after tea time."

" Oh well," he answered, " so did I. I got tired of it and thought I'd cut it. Bastwick was not anywhere within hail so I couldn't tell him. So now I'll walk back with you."

" Yes, do, Mr. Kerchival," said Ethne, genially. But Leland was thinking of that strong, fell primitive impulse which had come over her, to hurl her weaker companion into the depth below and was wondering whether Kerchival standing there as unconscious spectator had detected it too.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE OLD PEEL HOUSE

KERCHIVAL'S stay was drawing near its close. He had been there some three weeks or more, and when he had notified to his host for the second time that he must really move on, the latter had not, as on the first occasion, raised any objection.

To Kerchival his stay had not been one of unmixed delight, as we have shown, but it was radiancy itself compared with the prospect now before him. For with all shortcomings on her part his obsession for Leland, so far from lessening, had intensified. And now he was going, and she was remaining on, it seemed indefinitely, what would he not have given to wake up and find that they were back on the island again? The island! Why, by this time it was probably blotted from the face of the earth. Would that to which it had borne witness be blotted out too? At times it seemed to look like it.

We have said that Kerchival was a man of no great substance, had it been otherwise the situation might have been very different. Here he came and found Leland installed, or practically installed; in fact, there was a flavour of treating him as an honoured guest in her demeanour towards him already, which would have been amusing, only perhaps unfortun-

ately it was not disillusioning. A very few days more now, and he would return to his loneliness, without even the consolation that he was Number One.

Then he shook himself mentally. He too had been back to the primitive, he too had come back *from* the primitive. Bastwick was gradually taking his place. Bastwick had every advantage; previous acquaintanceship, previous relationship, and everything at his back. A glow of fell, murderous hate burned within Kerchival's heart as he dwelt on it. He felt dangerous; he *was* dangerous; for be it remembered he was a man who easily reverted to the primitive. It may have been unfortunate that while in this vein he should have come upon Leland, and with her, laughing and braying as he put it to himself, Derek Hilton.

He had strolled into the walled garden and there had met them face to face. It was not this nincompoop, however, that disturbed Kerchival's peace, except that at the present moment he was in the way.

"Send that young booby off, Leland," he said in an undertone, as the said "young booby" dropped behind to light the usual cigarette. "Where? Oh, anywhere, send him to fetch and carry for you, to retrieve something you haven't lost. Anything. I want to talk to you a bit."

Leland, as we have shown, was a person of resource, wherefore when Derek Hilton was asked with a sweet smile to go and find some article of apparel for her which she did not in the least want, the favoured youth bounded off housewards like an arrow from one of her former and primitive bows.

"Don't be long," she called after him, "and mind you bring it." Then to Kerchival, "Come along, dear. We'll dive through the other gate and stroll down towards the river. He'll be at least half an hour hunting for what I told him to get, and if he isn't he'll have fallen in with Ethne, so we shan't see him again."

They went through a postern in a thick, ivy-covered wall. Here on a seldom-used path on a river bank overhung by ash and birch, the high bracken on either side stirred by the rustle of disturbed rabbits, they felt themselves alone. Something in the look of it; the solemn stillness and the sun networking through the trees, suggested old times.

"Like a little bit of our island brought back," said Leland, passing a hand through his arm.

"Yes. I heartily wish to God it was our island brought back," was the answer, given with unusual vehemence. "Do you know, Leland, it seems to me sometimes now as if I had been asleep all this time and had dreamt that island episode. What has come over you?"

"Come over me?" she answered. "Now, now, dear, what should make you think anything had come over me?"

"Make me think? Why everything. You're not the same; you're some one totally different. Why, on the island how different it was. We were all in all to each other then."

"Well, and aren't we now?" she asked, tightening the pressure.

"No," he answered point blank. "I'm relegated to a back seat now." There was nothing petulant

in his tone, nothing aggrieved. It was a simple, downright statement of fact. She rather appreciated this.

"Is that what you find?" she said. "Well, I won't pretend to misunderstand, but you must know, dear, that conditions are different. We can't exactly do both of us together on the island here, can we? You see, I can't treat everybody else as if they weren't there, least of all Geoffrey, whose house we're in."

He did not answer for a moment. Then—

"Well, well. Let's leave it at that at present, but what about the future? Are you still prepared to risk it with me or not, because either way I think that now is the time to say so."

She looked at him straight. And then a great battle was going on within her. She thought of a life or at any rate part of a life of comparative poverty, which she hated and dreaded, as who does not who has been called upon to undergo it? She thought of how she was in a position to establish an ascendency here, as to which how little she reckoned what a vast mistake she might be making. And she looked hard at one man standing there before her, strong, compelling, and to whom she had even given the whole of her love. It seemed to her that at that moment the choice lay, the choice that would never be offered to her a second time. And then the postern gate through which they had come opened and slammed and the sound of voices.

"Oh, there you are, you two people," cried that of Bastwick. "Derek here said you were in the garden when we'd just given you up. We were starting

out for a stroll round to the old peel house; it's a grand evening for that sort of thing. Feel inclined to come along?"

"Why yes," answered Kerchival, while cursing the speaker with all the hidden powers within him.

"Couldn't find that thing of yours anywhere, Miss Goring," said Derek. And she addressed thought to detect in his face a look of suspicious resentment. Ethne was looking quite as usual, serene and at peace with all the world.

"Well, come along then," went on Bastwick. Kerchival was keenly observing, but Leland did not leave his side. She went on talking of other matters, as though taking up again the broken strands of a previous conversation.

But he hardly heard her. Their interrupted talk was what his mind persisted in dwelling upon. He had obtained no answer to his direct question, and indeed no more unfortunate form of interruption could have come to it. He found himself eyeing his host with something like murder in his glance and actual murder in his heart. He had become all primitive again, and it was just as well that the object of his jealous hate and he were not alone together and that beyond chances of interference.

We have said that the old peel house had been kept from falling into utter ruin through the interest felt in it by its present owner. Standing there upon the open moor it looked lonely and grim enough in all conscience, and the gibbet, stark against the sky line, was suggestively appropriate. Leland looked from one to the other.

"I can't think why you leave that ghastly thing

standing there, Geoffrey," she remarked. "You ought to have it pulled down and carted away. I've said so more than once."

"I know you have, dear," was the imperturbable reply. "But then I happen to think it rather picturesque, grimly picturesque certainly. And then who knows but what the gentleman who is supposed to 'walk' there might not transfer his attentions to Wood Bastwick if he should come to miss his ancient and familiar sign-post."

"Oh, I never thought of it from that point," she answered, with a laugh that was half serious.

If black hate had been burning in the heart of one listener there was that in this last rejoinder which fanned it up to hell pitch. The easy term of endearment, for instance, told its own tale. Of course they were on full terms of such. It did not occur to him that the two were related, though distantly, and had known each other for long. And then Leland's suggestion as to the removal of the gibbet had carried a tone of one who had a certain right to offer it—a tone of one who intended that sooner or later it should be carried out.

"Like to see inside the house, Kerchival?" went on Bastwick. "I've always meant you to see it, but somehow other things cropped up; however I've brought along the key now. It's the rummiest, ghostliest old shebang you ever saw in your life."

"So it ought to be, with that interesting 'sign' in full view," answered Kerchival, ordering his voice with admirable self-control.

The great brown key creaked in the lock, and the ponderous, worm-eaten door swung inwards. A

damp, mouldy, fungus-like breath rose up and met them.

"It's all right," reassured Bastwick. "No gas—only mould."

The dark interior certainly bore out his description of it. Huge oak beams, also worm-eaten, supported the low ceiling, half hidden with festooning cobwebs, and through the cracks in the stone floor slippery fungus squashed beneath their tread. Part of an old roasting-jack still hung over the earth-stodged fireplace, and the remains of two worm-eaten bins in the corner were plentifully stretched with cobwebs.

"Most horrid place for spiders, Ethne," said Derek mischievously. "Big black ones, you know."

"No, I don't," was the serene reply. "Where's your entomology, Derek? Spiders don't build where there are no flies, and flies don't live in the dark where there's nothing to eat. How's that?"

There was a great laugh.

"Got you there, Derek," cried Bastwick.

"Oh, I say! Well, yes. I suppose so," answered the discomfited one, entering into the joke.

They went into another room, rather more gloomy and cobweb-festooned than the first.

"Is this where the murder was done?" asked Kerchival.

"No. That was upstairs. Like to see it?"

"Yes."

"Come along then. But tread as light as you can, for I wouldn't answer for this very ancient woodwork. One at a time."

The upper part of the house was gained by a ladder staircase, and entered by a trap-door. Bast-

wick led the way, Kerchival came next, then the two girls, and last, but not least, as he himself put it, Derek.

Bastwick opened a rickety shutter and the daylight streamed in. If the downstair rooms had been gloomy, this was five times more so. There was no ceiling, only the attic-like rafters. The room was a large one and extended the whole length and breadth of the house. In the middle of it stood the dilapidated frame of an ancient fourposter.

"That's where it happened," said Bastwick, pointing to this. "Cheerful-looking place to spend a night in. Eh, Kerchival?"

"Rather! If ever there was a surrounding more thoroughly adapted to the manufacture of hobgoblins of the direst description, why I never heard tell of it."

"Hullo! That beam seems rather loose," observed Bastwick, looking up. A massive oaken beam protruded from the wall, at an angle of 45° above the fourposter—apparently there for no reason at all, unless it had been for that of sustaining a curtain above the bed. Bastwick stepped into the middle of the framework and reaching up proceeded to test the firmness—or the reverse—of this. "Yes, it wouldn't take much to bring that thing down," he went on.

"Here let me try it," said Kerchival, reaching up to the great beam.

At that moment, the light from the open shutter fell full upon his face, and his face was visible to one other only. He gave the massive oak one shake, and then—no one seemed to know exactly what happened,

except that Bastwick was lying on his back on the floor whither he had tumbled—or been tumbled—at the moment when the huge beam came crashing down upon the bed frame, smashing it to atoms right across the spot where he had been standing, and the hand which had been prompt to draw him from death to life had been the hand of the one who had seen that one flash upon Kerchival's face in the light through the open shutter.

"By Jove!" said Bastwick, picking himself up and rubbing his eyes; for a cloud of disturbed dust has arisen from the concussion. "That was a near shave and no mistake. Why, little Ethne—I didn't know you had got all that muscular force stored away somewhere," he added jocosely; but there was a hitch in his voice all the same, as he threw an arm round her shoulders.

The girl looked at him and her whole frame seemed to shake, but she said nothing; she could not or she would have broken down altogether; and this was just what she would not for the world have done, there and then.

"I tell you what it is, Kerchival," Bastwick went on, still jocosely, "you're a devilish sight too strong, man. Why, when I tried that beam I could hardly move it, and I don't reckon myself a weakling by any means. If I'd known what you were going to do I'd have got out of the way first, I can tell you."

This was said so easily, so naturally, as to carry relief—intense, inconceivable relief—to him to whom it was addressed. The awful paroxysm which had impelled the latter had passed. His face was

white as death, and the cold perspiration stood out upon it in beads.

"I'm most awfully sorry, old chap," he managed to mumble. "Who'd have thought that the thing would give way like that?"

"Oh, well. Accidents will happen," laughed Bastwick. "But it seems to me that this is really a deucedly unlucky place, and the sooner we get out of it the better."

"Ha, ha!" brayed Derek. "I should say it was a deucedly lucky one for you, old Boss."

"And why?"

"Why, getting off as you did. Now if my skull had been under that beam——"

"Wood to wood," interrupted his uncle drily.

CHAPTER XV

OF SURPRISE ALL ROUND

AN extraordinary compunction had come over Kerchival since this last reversion to the primitive; a deep feeling of thankfulness that the design of his blind mad rage had miscarried, although by a hair's breadth. And with this compunction had come a well-nigh over-mastering impulse frankly to make a clean breast of it to his intended victim; to own candidly to what he had intended—as to how the latter would take it, somehow or other he never gave a thought.

What added to this feeling was the fact that one within that household *knew*. He was aware that she knew, and she knew that he was aware that she did know. In the flashlight of that moment when her glance had searched his face his glance had met it. It had not escaped him either, that she had avoided him ever since. The night before, she had withdrawn herself before the usual hour of bedtime, obviously to avoid the necessity of shaking hands with him as usual when saying good-night, he told himself. She had come down in the middle of the morning when it was probable he would be out, in pursuance of the same idea, but somehow, if there was one point on which he felt strangely and com-

pletely certain, it was that she would keep her knowledge rigidly to herself.

Of a truth the man was miserable. This strong, ready, resourceful being who had surmounted the difficulties and braved the perils of a situation difficult and perilous enough to have taxed to the uttermost the resources and courage of any one man, now felt the latter attribute fail him. He felt as if he were up against a stone wall. There was no way out ahead.

In this bitter frame he was strolling moodily up and down the wooded river path, where he had been strolling that time yesterday, but now alone. No—there was no way out. He had lost everything, even self-respect; for had he not attempted the life of the man who was his host and that, figuratively speaking, on the latter's own hearth? There was nothing of the conventional villain about Kerchival, you see.

The turning of the creaking handle of the postern door caused him to look round quickly. Leland was standing, her tall fine figure framed in the ivy. She was looking from left to right as though in search of somebody. Of somebody? Of whom? he thought bitterly. But her next words brought a modicum of relief.

"Oh! there you are!" she cried, her face lighting up in genuine gladness which there was no mistaking. "Somehow I had an instinct I should find you here."

"Oh, you wanted to then?"

"Of course I did. It seems quite a long time since we had a talk together alone."

"So it does," he said bitterly. "And when we were beginning to have one here this time yesterday,

we were interrupted. Well, Leland. They say all ways part sooner or later, and now I suppose ours are going to part. And yet—we've been all in all to each other. I'd give the whole of the remainder of my life now for just those few months over again on the island—our Island of Eden!" he added, with an unmistakable quaver in the firm strong voice. "Well, it's of no use. I must throw up the sponge. You see I'm comparatively a pauper, and we can't revert to the primitive condition in civilization. Other people are more fortunate perhaps. "Now," straightening himself up with a kind of effort, "as an alternative. Do you remember what I was saying to you with regard to the future when we were interrupted here and this time yesterday?"

"Perfectly," she answered. "You can ask me the same question over again—here and this time to-morrow."

He looked gravely puzzled.

"But," he urged, "I'm leaving to-morrow, leaving quite early too."

She smiled, then clasped both hands round his arm, then withdrew them.

"Do as I tell you, dearest, and don't ask questions now," she answered, "for we are just going to be interrupted again."

"The bray of the omnipresent jackass as usual," he said, with a growl of disgust, as Derek's carrying voice was heard laying down the law to somebody; which "somebody" in half a minute took shape in Ethne, as the two appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, that's how the cat jumps, is it?" remarked that egregious youth in a stage *sotto voce*,

stopping short as he discovered that the river path was already tenanted, then going on again in obedience to a stern command from Ethne, and as the four merged, one of them was divided between two emotions, the finding of a lucid interpretation of Leland's last injunction and a well-nigh overmastering impulse to soundly kick Derek Hilton there and then.

That night in the middle of dinner Bastwick said, as his way was, *à propos* of nothing—

"Why don't you stop on another week, Kerchival? I don't know anything about your arrangements, but if they're not particularly urgent why break up shop? We're pretty jolly, aren't we? And I always think it's a mistake to break one's neck over time. We can get out some more trout meanwhile."

Kerchival was not often taken aback, but this time he was; in short, his host's cool, easy invite to extend his visit, was something in the nature of a commutation to a man sentenced to be hanged. And then, all aglow into his mind came Leland's enigmatical injunction uttered that afternoon: "You can ask me the same question over again—here and this time to-morrow."

He felt rather confused. He did not know what to make of it; conjuncting the two happenings it looked as if Leland had been inspiring this unexpected invite. So he acted on impulse.

"Well, old chap, it's awfully good of you," he answered. "The fact is I have nothing particularly urgent, but you know I've put in a goodish while

with you, and a jolly good while at that, and I think it's about time you got a bit sick of me."

"Oh, do you? Well, I haven't," answered Bastwick with a laugh. "So that's settled. Eh?"

There was one of the five seated there to whom this invite was a puzzle. But Ethne knew that her relative was even normally a good bit of a puzzle.

"Right oh, old chap," cried Derek. "We'll get even yet with that hundred up, ninety-seven you and a hundred I, then t'other way about. No, we must one of us do the conqueror."

Here was a curious element of tragedy, or rather comedy, surpervening on it. Three people in that room were principals thereto. As the two girls passed out, Ethne's eyes met those of Kerchival while he opened the door for them, and in them was a curious flash, partly of wonder, partly of warning, and both significances he grasped to the full.

"Here, Derek. Send round the port. It's by you," said Bastwick, as the three gathered snugly around the end of the table. "Why, man, you're doing it wrong," as the youth named handed it across to Kerchival. "You must send it to the left, you know, or it's unlucky."

"Oh, sorry. I forgot. That sort of thing is out of date. I say, Uncle Geoff, what side was it sent round from the night before last, just when you dodged that beam so deftly, or rather Ethne dodged it for you in the old peel house yesterday. Eh?"

"I don't know. Possibly from the same side as on the night before I stood under the old gibbet and some fellow lashed off a gun within an inch of my head," answered Bastwick carelessly. Whereat

Derek judiciously subsided, and then his elders lapsed into a discussion on the prospects of trout for some days in general and to-morrow in particular.

When they joined the ladies there was only one to join. Ethne had left an excuse. She had gone to bed early, was feeling tired. Again the significance of this was not lost upon Kerchival, and it availed to dash the temporary exhilaration pursuant on the renewed invite, likewise it strengthened him in a purpose he had been grimly working up to all that day.

Was there a certain look in Leland's eyes as they bade each other good-night at the foot of the stairs that helped to encourage him in the carrying out of the aforesaid purpose—and God knows he wanted encouragement enough. He thought perhaps there was, and yet how could she come into it? There was only one—one—who could come into it, and as he had decided before, she would not.

The smoke-room was the very ideal of comfort. Bastwick and Kerchival looked the very embodiment of comfort. Derek, with cavernous yawns, had lighted a candle and betaken himself to bed, to the mild relief of one and the intense relief of the other of the two left. For quite an interval neither said anything. The placid puff of their cigars seemed to make no demand upon conversation. Then Kerchival flung the stump of his into the ash tray and stood up.

"Look here, Bastwick," he began, speaking in his quick, downright way, "I'm going to tell you

something. Something that'll astonish you, by God."

"Ye-es?" queried the other, sending out a long column of smoke. "It'll have to be something mighty big unusual to do that, Kerchival. In fact, a new sensation, and without being *blasé* I'm absolutely covetous of new sensations. So—go ahead."

Kerchival took two or three steps up and down the room and fetched his breath with a gulp or two.

"Supposing some one told you that he had meant to kill you?" he said.

A smile came over Bastwick's face.

"Some one has meant to do that before to-day, Kerchival, on one or two occasions, but—well, they haven't exactly been there afterwards to tell me of their amiable intentions."

"I know, I know," went on the other quickly. "I've been through all that myself; most of us have who have helped to spread the Empire. But what I mean is, supposing some one here in our peaceful England; here at your very door, had tried that? What then?"

"What then?" answered Bastwick slowly. "Why, I don't know. I should begin to hunt about for his motive, I suppose. His motive. What's the joke?"

"Joke? There's no joke." Then sinking into a chair again. "Look here, Bastwick. You remember when we were in the old peel house yesterday?'

"Yes," said Bastwick, slowly, in consideration of a kind of gulping hesitancy on the part of the other.

"Well, you remember when the beam came down?"

"By Jove, I should think I did. It was one of the nearest squeaks I've had in my life, and I've had some. What then?"

Kerchival stopped in his quick short walk, stopped rigid. His eyes seemed to start from his head in the straight glance he darted upon the other.

"*I* pulled that beam down," he said. "On purpose—on purpose."

"I know you did," answered Bastwick, lying back in his armchair and blowing out another long cool cloud of smoke.

"Good heavens! You *know* I did?"

"Of course. For a motive. A fairly adequate motive, if a mistaken one."

Kerchival could do nothing but stare. Words failed him. He had deliberately attempted to murder his host and friend, and here his host and friend sat back comfortably in his armchair telling him he knew all about it. This was clean outside all his experience.

"You knew it?" he repeated, his face going white. "Great God! and what did you think of it?"

"Think of it? Why, man alive, that I'd had a devilish lucky escape, that's all."

The two men eyed each other. The glance of one that of utterly subdued compunction yet straight that of the other kindly, sympathetic, humorous.

"I see," went on Bastwick slowly. "I see. I see through it all. The fact is, Kerchival, you'd got hold of things all wrong. In short, things are not what you had imagined at all, but you are such an impulsive devil. Now I've learnt to dispense with

impulse, and you haven't, and yet we must be nearly the same time of life. Well, well! all's well that ends well. There's no occasion to tear our shirts over a mistake."

"A mistake?" echoed the other in utter bewilderment. "Why, what do you mean?"

"Mean?" said Bastwick, with a half smile. "I mean that you thought there was no room in the world for you and me and Leland. Well, there is."

"But—but," went on Kerchival, "do you mean that she's nothing to you."

"Not exactly. She is something to me, but very far from everything. Once I thought she was, that was over eight years ago"—Kerchival started—"but I don't mind telling you she threw me over, or, to use a still more homely expression, jilted me. I daresay she was right! Have another weed?"

He paused while he lit up one himself.

"Well," answered Kerchival slowly. "She told me a great deal about you, of course, but she didn't tell me that."

"No? Why should she? There was no occasion for it, and mind you, Kerchival, I'm not telling you this with any idea of belittling her, but that you may just see how the cat jumps. I don't mind telling you more, in fact, although it may seem to you beastly cold-blooded, but when I got her letter months ago, seeming to want to open up old relations, I thought I'd get her down here on her arrival and see what she was like after all that time. Sort of 'on trial,' don't you see," he broke off with a laugh. "Well, I did so, as you know, and in the result I came to the conclusion that we're not in the least

suited to each other, and if I'm not very much mistaken Leland came to exactly the same conclusion herself."

"But did you—er—put it to her?"

"Oh no. People can see through these things without vulgarizing them into words. Of course I don't know what might have happened if such a fascinating dog as yourself had not intervened, and put in all those months on that island of yours. But you did—so there you are."

A world of relief had come over his listener's face. Then gravely—

"Well, Bastwick. We used to call that our Island of Eden, and I can tell you that life of late has been spent by me wishing we were back on it."

Bastwick laughed.

"I daresay you have, old chap. But fortunately, perhaps, you were burnt out. So you thought I was putting your nose out of joint, did you?"

"Well, yes, I certainly did. Look here, Bastwick, it's a devilish rum thing to have to apologize to a man for trying to murder him, for that's the plain English of it. And yet I do, and that most sincerely."

Bastwick threw back his head and laughed; roared, shouted—it is a wonder he did not wake up the whole house. It was the biggest and best laugh he had had since reading his sister's letter with regard to Ethne.

"Well, then, don't apologize," he answered when he had recovered speech. "There's no need to, for if it's any consolation to you, Kerchival, I may as well tell you that if I had been in your place I should probably have acted in just the same way."

Kerchival stared. He could hardly believe he was awake.

"Well, you are a record, Bastwick, by God! Here. Shake." And the two men gripped hands heartily.

"It strikes me," said Bastwick, "that we've been talking ourselves dry all this time. What about this?" shoving the decanter and syphon towards the other. "Fill up and we'll drink her health."

Down on the wooded river path the declining sun networked in golden links. Here and there a rising trout made wide circles on the pool below, but for such one of their sworn pursuers had here and to-day no thought. Between fern and tall foxglove bordering the mossy walk he was standing and with him another.

"Was I right?" said that other, "when I implied that you were not leaving to-day. Did I say something about this time and to-day? Well, and here we are, and now if you want to we can talk about the future." Never to his eyes had she looked more wholly alluring in her large splendid beauty, than when now thus restored to him. "I think," she went on—presently—"we must now find or make another Island of Eden."

And the coo of cushats from the leafage overhead and around seemed to make ratifying murmur.

ENVOI

THE fireplace in Bastwick's library was full of ashes, although it was still summer. Bastwick himself was contemplating these with equanimity from the other side of the table. The hideous dragon head in the middle of the chimneypiece seemed to take on a nasty grin.

"Oh, grin away, you old fool," said its owner cheerily, apostrophizing the inanimate wood. "Howling joke, isn't it? This stupid old world with all its illusions and delusions and general insanity—— Yes, come in," in answer to a knock.

"I'm afraid I'm disturbing you, dear?" said Ethne. "If so, it will keep."

"No, no. Not a bit," he answered. "Well, little Ethne, I suppose your mind's at rest now. For I think you were rather fed up with Leland."

She changed colour slightly.

"Well, the fact is I was," she admitted. "Things seemed not quite the same somehow after she came. We were so jolly together before, you and me."

"So we were, darling, so we were," he answered, and always have been and always will be," throwing an arm round her as she stood beside him.

Crash!

Both started.

"Goodness! look at that!" cried Ethne. "The Jabberwock head has come off of itself!"

Sure enough, there in the fender lay the hideous gnome-like object. It *had* come off of itself.

"Well, little Ethne, you've got your wish of a lifetime, and we won't stick the thing on again," said Bastwick.

A tornado was a joke in comparison with Derek Hilton as in answer to his mother's frantic summons he hurried to her boudoir and ran his glance down the open letter which she speechlessly handed to him. His impulse on mastering its contents was first to break all the furniture and then to start out and shoot somebody.

"It's positively wicked—wicked," whimpered poor Mrs. Hilton. "And at his age, too!"

Derek had a fine command of language—when his murderous road engine broke down, for instance—and with a male audience he would simply have beaten his own record on this occasion. But his mother's presence perforce restrained him.

"Yes," he said, handing back the letter. "No fool like an old fool, anyhow. Bang goes Wood Bastwick from me for ever and ever. Amen."

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